Postcolonial Parodies of the Creation Story in Olive Schreiner and Wilson Harris

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https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-bhz9-9n20

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POSTCOLONIAL PARODIES OF THE CREATION STORY IN
OLIVE SCHREINER AND WILSON HARRIS

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by
Jamie Quatro
1999
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Approved, November 1999

Chris Bongie

Adam Potkay

Monica Potkay
To McKenna, Keaton, and Hallie,

my best Philosophers
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation to Professors Adam and Monica Potkay for their insight and guidance during the final phase of this project; to Bill and Karen Vogler, whose teaching on the unity of the Old and New Testaments and the propitiatory work of the cross in large part informed my Conclusion; and to the faculty and staff of the Dordt College Business Department, who graciously "loaned" me an office, computer, and printer while I completed the final draft of this thesis.

I am especially indebted to my advisor, Professor Chris Bongie, who refused to let this project die during the nearly five years it sat unattended, but hoped against hope that its author would be faithful to complete it. His contributions to this thesis are almost too numerous to list: his unflagging excitement for the project, which inspired me anew after the dry spell; his patient, informed, and intellectually challenging direction of the overall scope of the argument; his tireless reading, re-reading, and copy-editing of a manuscript that grew exponentially with each draft; and his unfailing confidence in my abilities as a student and writer during a time when even I had forgotten that I had the ability to be either.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband Scott for his support and encouragement while I finished composing and editing this thesis; for his unselfish caretaking of our three children at home while I spent the long summer days writing in his office; and for loving me enough to pull me out of the theoretical clouds every now and then to remind me what it's really all about.

Jamie Quatro
October 1999
Soli Deo Gloria
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (South Africa) and Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (Guyana) can be read as parodic, postcolonial rewritings of the biblical creation story in the first chapter of Genesis.

The Introduction briefly defines the term "postcolonial" as it is used in the thesis. Part One introduces Schreiner and gives some biographical/textual background that prepares the ground for an examination of the novel in a postcolonial context. Then, by way of preface to the argument about *Story*, the thesis looks at how another, more obviously postcolonial author, Harris, revises the Genesis account in his *Palace*.

Part Two focuses entirely on *Story*, with a careful look at the "Times and Seasons" chapter, a peculiar bridge between the novel's two parts that can be read as Schreiner's seven-stage allegorization of the Genesis One account of creation, an account that is founded upon a system of binary oppositions (e.g. light/dark). I argue that her revision (or parody) departs structurally from the Genesis model in two ways: first, Schreiner's seven-stage allegory only loosely follows the order of the biblical narrative, eventually abandoning the Genesis order altogether and assuming an "order" of its own; and second, pervading Schreiner's allegory is a dichotomy--divine justice versus mercy--that is nowhere present in the biblical creation account, but is raised only in later chapters of Genesis. Schreiner's "beginning," then, is contaminated by ideas that are not really a part of the biblical beginning; this reordering and confusion of the biblical text exemplifies the novel's postcolonial condition.

After this close examination of Schreiner's parody of the first chapter of Genesis, the thesis concludes with a very brief look at both Schreiner's and Harris's endings, noting how the late-nineteenth century novelist remains ensconced within the framework of binary oppositions from which she is trying to wrest herself free, while Harris comes closer to achieving what we might call a postmodern movement out of the inherent dichotomies of language.
POSTCOLONIAL PARODIES OF THE CREATION STORY IN OLIVE SCHREINER AND WILSON HARRIS

“He saw the blind dream of creation crumble as it was re-enacted.”

Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*
INTRODUCTION: “THE POST-COLONIAL IS DEAD; LONG LIVE POSTCOLONIALISM”

In 1989, three Australian writers—Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin—published The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, the first (and ten years later still very much a standard) introduction to the burgeoning field of post-colonial studies. In a 1991 critique of this book, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge begin with a question that inevitably lies at the root of any scholarly discussion regarding post-colonial discourse (and which thus also lies at the root of the present study): namely, ”What is post(-)colonialism?” Historically speaking, they note, the term emerged as a replacement for "Commonwealth Literature," a concept that came to be seen as ambiguous and ideologically loaded both because it subtly reinscribed a distinction between the center (Britain) and its margins (the Commonwealth) and because it implied a false unity between the former imperial power and its colonies. By contrast, the replacement term foregrounded the political/cultural struggles between center and periphery, and abetted the ”destabilization of the barriers around 'English Literature' that protected the primacy of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards” (Hodge 399).

However, since its advent, the term "post-colonial" has created more confusion than it has resolved. In recent years an increasing number of critics have started both to expose and collapse the assumptions inherent within the term “post-colonial” in
whichever of its many contexts it is used (e.g., describing certain societies and their histories; categorizing the literatures these societies have produced; or designating an entire academic discourse)\(^1\). In each such context, questions of the following sort resonate deeply: “When was ‘the post-colonial?’” (Hall 242). What literatures can fall under its rubric? Does its ostensibly definitive periodisation (*past* colonization) refer to a chronological break in two histories, or to a rupture between two ways of understanding those histories; in other words, is the “post-colonial” an historical or an epistemological term? Is it both?

Perhaps the best place to start is with a reiteration of the problematic binaries that are implicit in the term “post-colonial.” The mere presence of the hyphen would seem to indicate a simple division between the purely “colonial” and the purely “post” (or past, both temporally and ideologically) colonial. Historically, a country would be colonial only as long as it was occupied by the colonizer, and would become post-colonial after the demise of imperial rule. Transposing this logic to the literary realm, a “colonial” text would be one produced during colonial rule, would attempt to repeat the center on the periphery, and would not intend any revision of the central tenets of colonial power (e.g. white supremacy, Christianity, etc.). A “post-colonial” text, then, would be one written after colonial occupation and would consciously and intentionally revise and/or reject the literary and ideological traditions of the imperial center. Viewed in this way, the movement from the colonial to the post-colonial would be linear and chronological—a definitive moment in history, with the spaces on either side marked accordingly.

However, as critics like Hodge and Mishra, Ella Shohat, Stuart Hall, and others
have almost unanimously pointed out, this type of binary logic is easily deconstructed, as
neither the wholly “colonial” nor the wholly “post-colonial” text can in fact exist, in the
same way that neither the wholly colonial nor the wholly post-colonial culture can exist.
Because the very act of colonization involves the superimposition of one (imperial)
culture upon another (indigenous) culture, a colonial society will always be a mix of the
two, a hybridized culture in which the interplay of (often conflicting) ideologies, customs,
and peoples comes to define the society at large. Likewise, a society that has experienced
colonialism and its aftermath will never be able fully to return to its pre-colonial
condition, as the colonial experience leaves its indelible marks (such as racial
intermixture, religious ideologies, and memories of slavery) on virtually every aspect of
the culture, including its literatures. The post-colonial text (one produced after the
official departure of the colonial power) will thus inevitably contain elements of the
colonial (even as it strives to wrest its freedom from that influence); moreover, the
colonial work will always already be “post” colonial as it (either consciously or
unconsciously) wrestles through, and from within, the conflicting cultural biases
constitutive of colonial societies. Any attempt, therefore, to take a “then and now,” “us
and them” approach to classing or examining a society and its literary works as “post-
colonial” is an exercise in futility. One could, in effect, say that the post-colonial was
dead on arrival.

Faced with this situation, what are critics to do? Are we to throw up our hands in
the face of an experience and a discourse that resists any kind of black and white
absolutism? Certainly not. If poststructuralism has taught us anything, it is how to wield
our scholarly swords among toppling signifiers and signifieds; how to neither collapse our opposing categories nor posit any unqualified distinction between them. If we are to confront post-colonial discourse, then, it must be with a sensitivity to the ambivalent territories opened up by poststructuralism, as Hodge and Mishra contend. They propose a middle ground between the two (impossible) extremes of the colonial and post-colonial: namely, the *postcolonial* (no hyphen), an “always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power . . . [, a] form of ‘postcolonialism’ [that] is not ‘post-’ something or other but is already implicit in the discourses of colonialism themselves” (407). This “complicit postcolonialism” differs from the hyphenated version in that it is an ideological orientation rather than an historical stage, an epistemology rather than a chronology. It does not attempt to set up a “then” and “now,” “home” and “abroad” perspective, but acknowledges the interdependent, symbiotic relationship between colonizer and colonized (unlike the more polemical, if equally ideological, perspective of what they call “oppositional post-colonialism”). As Hall points out, colonization “was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis. It was always inscribed deeply within them as it became indelibly inscribed in the cultures of the colonized” (Hall 246). As Mishra and Hall put it, “the post-colonial is dead; long live postcolonialism” (413).

Given this shift away from the post-colonial as a “movement of linear transcendence between two mutually exclusive states” toward the postcolonial as an inclusive epistemological concept in which center and periphery, before and after, can
only be understood as they relate to one another, a host of works that would otherwise have fallen outside the frame of the post-colonial (e.g., works written by white settlers in the colonies, or works written by indigenous authors during the period of colonial occupation) can now be examined under the postcolonial rubric. Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883—henceforth *Story*) is one such work. As I will be arguing, Schreiner’s *Story* (which until recently would have been classed only as a “colonial” work, given the South African Schreiner’s European [English and German] ancestry and the century in which she wrote) can be read as an almost quintessentially postcolonial text in its repetition and attempted revision of the colonizer’s (Europe’s) story of origin—specifically, the Genesis (Chapter One) account of creation in the Bible.

Part One of this thesis will first introduce Schreiner and give some biographical/textual background for an examination of the novel in a postcolonial context. Then, by way of preface to my argument about *Story*, I will be looking at how another, more obviously postcolonial author, Guyana’s Wilson Harris, similarly revises the Genesis creation account in his *Palace of the Peacock* (1960); this comparison will foreground some of the ways in which Harris and Schreiner differ in their attempts at “writing out of” the stories of Empire (and in their degree of “success” at achieving this). Part Two will focus entirely on *Story*, with a careful examination of the “Times and Seasons” chapter, a peculiar bridge between the novel’s two parts that can be read as Schreiner’s seven-stage allegorization of the Genesis One account of creation. I will argue that her revision departs structurally from the Genesis model in two ways: 1) Schreiner’s seven-stage allegory, while clearly evoking the seven-day creation narrative
in Genesis One, only loosely follows the order of that biblical narrative, eventually abandoning the Genesis One order altogether and assuming an “order” of its own (e.g., the biblical seventh day of rest is displaced to day 5; days 6 and 7 are conflated); and 2) pervading Schreiner’s allegory is a dichotomy—divine justice versus mercy—that is nowhere present in the Bible’s Genesis One, but is raised only in later chapters of Genesis (beginning in Chapter 3).

Schreiner’s “beginning,” then, is contaminated by ideas that are not really a part of the biblical beginning; her presentation of the creation story is disorderly not only in its “re-ordering” of the creation narrative’s events, but also in its inclusion of biblical elements that do not “rightly” belong in Genesis One, but come after it. These two structural “failures” evidence the above point that there is always-already an element of the postcolonial implicit in the colonial text; that colonial texts might well wish faithfully to mimic their “central” models, but of necessity fail in this effort (disordering the original story, getting it mixed up with other stories). Schreiner’s Story is more complex in that, while it indeed attempts to mimic the central model, it also reveals itself as being uneasy with that model, distorting it in an unfaithful manner that will come to be associated with texts from the historically post-colonial period (around 1950 and after).

After looking closely at Schreiner’s (un)faithful rendition of the first chapter of Genesis, the thesis will conclude with a very brief look at both Schreiner’s and Harris’s endings, noting how the late-nineteenth-century novelist remains ensconced within the framework of binary oppositions from which she is trying to wrest herself free, while Harris comes closer to achieving what we might call a postmodern movement out of the
inherent dichotomies of language and into a future that could well set the stage for the actual passage, at least within literature, into a truly post-colonial space.
PART ONE: "THE VEIL OF CREATION"

The ancient Chaldean seer had a vision of a Garden of Eden which lay in a remote past . . . We also have our dream of a Garden, but it lies in a distant future.

Olive Schreiner, Woman and Labour

Seven days it had taken to finish the original veil of creation that shaped and ordered all things to be solid in the beginning. So the oldest fable ran. Perhaps seven, too, were needed to strip and subtilize everything.

Wilson Harris, The Secret Ladder

When in 1911 the South African writer Olive Schreiner envisioned the future of women's struggle for equality, she cast her depiction in biblical terms, describing the collective "dream of a Garden" as a boat full of "women with oars, rowing hard against the stream, the horizon they aim to reach veiled in mists, but convinced that what they see dimly ahead is not a delusion . . . [but] a new Garden of Eden" (quoted in Berkman 158). Such imaginative re-visionings of the past—specifically the Judeo-Christian past as recounted in the opening chapters of Genesis—occur time and again in Schreiner's work.
Take, for example, her reversal of the account of woman as man's "help meet" (Genesis 2:18;20) in "Three Dreams in a Desert": "And I said, 'Surely he who stands beside her will help her?' And he beside me answered, 'He cannot help her: she must help herself. Let her struggle till she is strong'" (Dreams 59). Again, in Thoughts on South Africa Schreiner uses the image of the tree of life (Genesis 3:22) "under whose protecting shadow endless forms of life may spring up and flourish" (Thoughts 355) to describe what she in her early years saw as the nurturing role of imperial England, recasting the image as a "tree of death" (a "colossal upas-tree" under whose poisonous branches "plants, flowers, and animals suffocated" [333]) when she later became critical of colonial rule. Finally, in the example that will occupy us here--The Story of an African Farm--Schreiner delineates the seven stages in the creation and development of the individual psyche, an account that, I will argue, both loosely mimics and substantially revises the seven days of creation as presented in the opening chapter of Genesis.

That Schreiner should be thus concerned with mimicking and rewriting traditional biblical tropology can be attributed in part to her childhood rearing in and rejection of the Christian faith. Finding it nearly impossible to accept the religious precepts of her missionary parents (who preached the inferiority of women to men, the sinfulness of the body, and the racial and ethnic superiority of white Britons to all other races), Schreiner early counted herself among the damned (Berkman 17). Not only did she rebel against her parents' teachings, but, at the young age of five, she was unable to reconcile her certainty regarding a pervasive cosmic integration (her sense that there was a "unity of all things, that they were alive, and that I was a part of them" [Cronwright-Schreiner, Life
218]) with the Calvinist emphases on God's sovereignty, dualism of body and soul, and man's depravity versus God's perfection. The stage was thus set for her total rejection of the Christian faith at the age of nine, when, after her younger sister Ellie's death, she could no longer "accept the ordinary doctrine that [one who died] was living somewhere without a body" (219). In later years Schreiner denied the divinity of Christ (pejoratively referring to "Christianity, with its horrible doctrine of man as God!" [Cronwright-Schreiner, Letters 307]) and reconceived God-the-Father as a genderless spiritual entity (Dreams 156).

Despite this complete disavowal of belief in anything that could be deemed "traditional" Christianity, the Bible itself continued to play an important role in Schreiner's literary works. As scholars almost unfailingly point out, her novels are "steeped in biblical syntax" (Berkman 229) and ring with the "sonorous phrases of the Old Testament and the striking simplicity of the gospels" (Haynes 76-77) even as they contest and revise the central tenets of both Testaments. Certainly Schreiner's religious upbringing and subsequent repudiation of the Christian faith (a familiar Victorian trajectory) can begin to account for this simultaneous repetition and revision. However, this biographical information does not account for Schreiner's particular attention to revising the Genesis text. While the Genesis One account, according to traditional interpretation, is concerned with the production of order out of chaos by the divine establishment of various polarizations (for example, heaven/earth, light/dark, day/night, and man/animal), Schreiner's revision of Genesis One, as mentioned earlier, is more concerned with revising a polarization that is not established until Genesis Three: God's
holiness versus human depravity, God’s wrath versus his love. Indeed, as the seven
days/stages in the soul’s development progress, it becomes evident that Schreiner’s text
ultimately aims not just to revise these particular oppositional ideas (even as it
accomplishes that revision structurally in the two ways outlined earlier), but to escape the
very notion of binary opposition itself.

Schreiner’s use of the Genesis framework to contest the notion of binary
opposition, as I will argue in more detail in Part Two of this thesis, is best understood
within a postcolonial framework. To understand why, one must first understand the
centrality of the Bible, and Judeo-Christian ideology itself, to the colonial enterprise.
First, on a large scale, one of the pursuits of the imperial center was to “Christianize the
heathen.” The idea that the West would be the harbinger of salvation to the “rest” served
as the major justification for many of the atrocities of slavery and racial subjugation in the
colonies (what Derek Walcott has called the “conversion of the tribe” [“Muse of
History”]). Thus evangelization itself was one cause of polarization within the
colonies—the saved versus the unsaved, Christians versus heathens. Secondly, on a
smaller scale, the Genesis account proved significant in and of itself, as the Empire (like
the God of the Old Testament who creates a utopic Garden of Eden) tried to “play God”
and create new Edens of its own within the settler colonies. And, just as the Genesis
account is predicated upon a system of diametric oppositions (e.g., light versus dark
[“And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness”
(1:4)]; day versus night [“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the
heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and
for days, and years” (1:14]); man versus animal [“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth” (1:26)]), so too is the imperial attempt to create a colony based on a system of underlying oppositions: racial/ethnic (black versus white); theological (heathen versus Christian); cultural (indigenous versus settler); and political (colony versus metropole). Therefore, if one is going to revise the notion of opposition from within a colonial setting, one had best start by “writing out of” the originating Genesis text.

Before continuing, it must be noted that I do not mean to suggest that the literary revisioning of the seven-day Genesis creation story is a uniquely postcolonial endeavor. Indeed, literary works always consist, to a lesser or greater extent, of the works that have gone before. Perhaps no other text has been subject to this kind of intertextual re-vision than the Bible itself, especially the creation account in Genesis One⁶. However, what I do want to suggest is that, whereas an author like Milton is writing from within a particular well-established tradition (that we now identify as the English literary canon), in postcolonial writing this tradition is appropriated and re-visioned from the relatively uncharted margins of that tradition, at least one remove (i.e., geographically) from the center. Thus, postcolonial texts such as Schreiner’s might seem to be written simply from the “center” of the European literary tradition (a tradition in which rewritings of biblical stories are ubiquitous); yet they are not quite the same as the tradition’s, as Schreiner is forced to grapple with a different set of questions than did writers like Milton or Blake, since she has to confront the “alien” nature of that tradition on African soil. Thus Schreiner’s imitation of Genesis is at an immediate “disadvantage,” its project of mimetic
re-vision seemingly doomed to failure. As mentioned in the Introduction, this “failure” manifests itself in the “Times and Seasons” chapter in two ways: in the tenuousness of any one-to-one adherence to the Genesis One model; and in the contaminatory presence of a dichotomy—justice versus mercy—that is nowhere present in the first chapter of Genesis itself.

However, this “failure” need not be cast in a negative light (as it most likely would have been in Schreiner’s Victorian era, as discussed below), but can be looked upon positively as a move away from the “colonial” model, a movement through (and beyond) the original text. This is precisely what Schreiner—subtly, and perhaps even unintentionally—assays in the “Times and Seasons” chapter (note the echoes in her chapter title of the biblical passage cited above, where day and night serve as “signs to mark seasons and days and years”), which attempts to deconstruct binaries like the justice/mercy dichotomy via her (albeit imperfect) mimicry of the Genesis creation story. This idea of mimicry was an important one in Schreiner’s Victorian (pre-modernist) era, during which time the “ideal of mimetic representation” was upheld as the central feature of “great” literature (Monsman 48). Thus, a “great” work would strive both to re-present a “real” England, and to imitate the works that had come before (Austen, Dickens, Eliot, etc.). In the former respect Schreiner was at an immediate disadvantage, as she was confined to the colony (she was nearly thirty when she first left South Africa), and was denied access to the kind of experiences privileged by the center, those experiences with which "literature" was supposedly concerned. Thus Schreiner, to cite The Empire Writes Back’s discussion of the unique predicament of the colonial author, was "consigned to a
world of mimicry and imitation, since [she was] forced to write about material which lies at one remove from the significant experiences of the post-colonial world" (Ashcroft 88). Schreiner's first novel, Undine (published after Story), is one such "failed" colonial attempt to write a traditional Victorian novel: set in an England she had never seen, at "one remove" (at least!) from her significant experiences, Undine is in large part a pastiche that "unfortunately . . . echoes a host of nineteenth-century novels, from those of George Eliot to the then-popular works of Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant" (Monsman 38). While Story was, for the most part, well-received in its own day (see First and Scott 120-124), much of its negative appraisal in the 1960s and '70s was likewise based on the assumption that the work is an imperfect imitation of the traditional Victorian novel, failing to adhere to such nineteenth-century conventions as linear narrative and realistic character portrayal, and jumbling together several narrative modes in a style that Joyce Avrech Berkman, in a reappraisal of Schreiner's technique, has called an "aesthetics of literary miscegenation" (Berkman 195).

Yet it is precisely this "failed" mimicry that renders the novel both artistically and theoretically significant, for it points to Schreiner's uniquely postcolonial situation: that is, the textual failure to create a novel that mimics the "stories" of Empire bespeaks the very failure of Empire to create a colony capable of mimicking the culture of the metropolitan center. It is here, when we read Schreiner's unsuccessful textual mimicry as a literary re-enactment of the failures of the colonial enterprise, that the biblical creation account becomes central. J. M. Coetzee notes that the original colonization of South Africa was an abortive attempt to create a new Garden of Eden in the Cape, to "hold the
colony to what it had originally been planned as: a trading post, a garden . . . Why did [this] garden myth, the myth of a return to Eden and innocence, fail to take root in the garden colony of the Cape?" (Coetzee 1-2). Coetzee's answer is straightforward enough: "The simplest answer to the question is that Africa could never, in the European imagination, be the home of the earthly paradise because Africa was not a new world" (2—my italics). In other words, the colonizer's attempt to inscribe the biblical story upon the indigenous culture is always-already positioned for failure, as the European text can never fully replace the existing cultural "text," but will merely be superimposed over it in palimpsest fashion. Thus the biblical creation story—indeed, any imperial "story"—can only be "misread" by those living in the colony, be they colonizer or colonized.

Schreiner's mimicry of the seven-day creation story in Story, then, is one such inevitable "misreading" of the originary biblical text, the effect of which is parodic. In using the term "parody" to describe Schreiner's revision of the creation story I am adopting Linda Hutcheon's insightful definition of parody (in her Theory of Parody [1985]) as "not just that ridiculing imitation mentioned in the standard dictionary definitions . . . but imitation characterized by ironic inversion . . . Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (Hutcheon 5-6).

Hutcheon points out that parody often functions as a means of coming to terms with the past "through ironic recoding" and that parody's "historical consciousness" (that is, its self-conscious acknowledgement that it is both referring back to and recoding a prior text) gives it the "potential power to both bury the dead, so to speak, and also to give it new life" (101). In subsequent articles and books, Hutcheon (herself the product of a settler
colony, Canada) would go on to develop this point in the specific context of the postcolonial author, whose parodies of Western texts will always, in one way or another, function as cleansing—and yet inevitably compromised—attempts to "write out of" imperial textual/ideological authority. In this sense, Schreiner's parodic revision of the creation story is simultaneously a journey into the colonial past (via her mimicry of the biblical text, the "vision of the ancient Chaldean") and a movement toward the postcolonial future (via her misreading of that vision in an attempt to re-create an Eden that "lies in a distant future").

Whether or not Schreiner's story—The Story of an African Farm—accomplishes this movement out of the biblical/colonial stories of the past and into a textual future free of the oppositional structures imposed by texts like the Genesis narrative is the driving question in my examination of the novel. While I have mentioned some of the oppositions laid out in the first and third chapters of Genesis (both of which occupy "Times and Seasons"), perhaps the most obvious "oppositional structure" in the Christian Bible is its own bipartite division into the Old and New Testaments, a division that the two-part structure of Story apparently mimics. Yet this surface reading is too simple, for Part One—as we will see—details the contamination and failure of both Old and New Testament teachings, ultimately displaying the breakdown of the bipartite biblical structure itself. This breakdown is further amplified by the "Times and Seasons" chapter, a curious bridge between the two parts that functions as Schreiner's sevenfold attempt to "re-create" a religious paradigm that has already broken down in Part One. The seven stages in the soul's development outlined in that chapter are loosely parallel to the
Genesis account of the seven days of creation. However, as I will detail further in Part Two, while the creation story is clearly evoked, the further into the chapter we read the more evident it becomes that the one-to-one structural correspondence is barely readable. Rather, the creation story becomes for Schreiner a mere framing device within which she attempts to eradicate/reconcile the various binary oppositions she reads as posited by the Bible (e.g., a just [Old Testament] versus a loving [New Testament] God; human versus animal). And, as both the later stages in the soul’s development and the second half of the novel reveal, Schreiner is unsuccessful in this attempt. Her inability to work with the pre-existing structures of the Bible (i.e., the Old/New Testament structure and the Genesis One story) lead to her very imprisonment by those structures: justice and mercy, black and white, human and animal remain in diametric opposition to one another. Indeed, the second half of the novel resounds with religious disillusionment and racist overtones.

Schreiner's failure to wrest herself free from the racial stereotypes of her time (even as she strove to eliminate sexual stereotypes) was the source of immense conflict in her life and writing. For instance, on the one hand she promoted racial intermixture as the means to a more egalitarian society, predicting that a racial "choral symphony" would emerge from continued intermarriage (Berkman 118); on the other, she supported Darwin's theory of biological reversion (atavism) in interracial breeding (88), and continued to use derisive terms like "half-caste" (Schreiner, Thoughts 140), "nigger" (Diamond Fields 15-16), and "Hottentot" (Thoughts 52). Again, she argued that global unity would result "not in the extermination of earth's varied races, or in the dominance of anyone over all . . . but in a free and equal federation of all" (296-97); however, when
asked if she was a "negrophile," Schreiner replied:

No—we are trying to be, but we are not yet . . . It would be a lie to say we loved
the black man . . . [but] we will treat him as if we loved him: and in time . . . we
shall perhaps be able to look deep into each other's eyes and smile: as parent and
child. (361—my italics)

The simultaneous occupation of two such contradictory positions is basic to Schreiner's
perspective—an ambivalence that, as I have argued, is at the heart of postcolonialism.

Finally, then, Schreiner's continued reliance on the idea of oppositional structure,
both biographically (even her eventual "love" for the African is conceived in hierarchical
terms) and in her fiction signals the fact that, while she does indeed parody the creation
text and strive to overthrow its system of binary oppositions, she remains ensconced
within the very framework her parody tries to undermine and undo. Thus, the second half
of Story does not attempt to "re-structure" the world according to a non-oppositional
system, but reflects a world in which the too-rigid (for Schreiner) structures of the Bible
are present as distant echoes; the patriarchal system of binary oppositions remains present
to the end. Schreiner's failure to escape colonial/Victorian dualisms in Story may have
contributed to the fact that she reached an impasse after its publication and was never able
to complete another novel, spending the remaining years of her life in a state of creative
frustration, summed up in her lament in an 1899 letter to Havelock Ellis: "I am only a
broken and untried possibility" (Cronwright-Schreiner, Letters 227).

Schreiner's "failed" literary attempt to escape imperial/patriarchal dichotomies
raises an issue important not only to her own colonial era, but to our postmodern/poststructuralist era as well: how does one move away from the hierarchical linguistic constructs of the Eurocentric past? After all, if Derrida and his ilk have taught us anything, it is that the very act of *enonciation* places the speaker/writer squarely within the realm of oppositional hierarchy, as language itself is based upon a system of contraries (i.e., the concept of "light" would not exist without its counterpart, "dark") that implicitly privileges one term over another (light over dark, white over black, etc.).

Given this *a priori* condition, any creative attempt to transform the language so that its dichotomies become not just inverted but eradicated would seem destined to fail; the task of producing a fiction that might somehow purge the biases inherent in language itself would appear to be an exercise in futility.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of this enterprise, it is precisely such a task that Wilson Harris undertakes in his first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, which works insistently toward breaking free from the realm of oppositional structure (indeed, from the very notion of "structure" itself), "consuming its own biases" (Harris, *Womb* 26) through both a radical re-vision of conventional language use and, as Schreiner assayed in *Story*, a parodic "misreading" of the *Genesis* story. In *Palace* this parody begins with "The Second Death,"¹⁴ the third of its four books (as in *Story*, the novel's halfway point serving as the point of departure for the story of beginnings), when the plantation owner Donne and his multiracial river crew commence a seven-day journey upriver into the Guyanese interior as they pursue the aboriginal "folk" who have fled Donne's harsh rule. Most critics agree that the "allotted seven" days (*Palace* 76) allude to the seven-day creation story in
Genesis, and they almost without exception read the two texts as parallel. While this type of reading is an important step toward understanding Harris' work in terms of its biblical intertext, I would take the argument one step further to contend that, given Harris's Caribbean context, and his own theoretical/creative project, the seven-day river journey in Palace can only be read as a reverse parallel movement through the Genesis account in an attempt (like Schreiner's) to "write out of" this particular imperial story, to "strip and subtilize" the "original veil of creation" (Secret Ladder 417) outlined in the Bible. In calling the biblical creation story a "veil" Harris implies that it hides or obscures what lies behind—here, among other things, the pre-colonial "text" of indigenous Caribbean culture (a notion similar to the "palimpsest" effect described above). The seven-day structure of the last half of Palace functions as the "stripping" away of this veil, the first day of the journey being analogous to the seventh "day of rest" in the Bible, the second to the sixth, and so forth, continuing until this one-to-one (reverse) mimicry falls apart on the fifth (third) day, with the final two days of the voyage running together with no clear structure as guide. Finally, the crew reaches a primordial, pre-Edenic state in which the oppositional biases inherent in Genesis (e.g. light/dark, heavens/earth) have been eroded and replaced by the protean, apocalyptic image of the "palace of the peacock" itself (a "symbol of totality" that "unite[s] the disparate elements of creation" [Maes-Jelinek, Naked Design 54]). Thus Harris more nearly approaches a "re-creation" of his textual universe than does Schreiner, a re-creation that may well mark the passage from a colonial to a post(-)colonial world.

Why is Harris able so radically to re-vision the biblical creation story while
Schreiner remains fixed in its inherent system of oppositions? There are a number of possible reasons, a few of which it will be helpful to expound upon here before taking a closer look at The Story of an African Farm. As Schreiner's concern with the creation story is inextricably linked to her identity as a South African writer living in a racially divided society of natives and settlers, so too is Harris's reverse movement through the Genesis text—the European text of origin—directly tied to his identity as a Caribbean writer, for "one of the most clearly and frequently seen regularities of the Caribbean novel is its reiteration of the theme that has come to be known as 'the search for identity' or 'the search for roots'" (Benitez-Rojo 186). The ubiquitous Caribbean literary quest to recover origins—origins that will "authorize a beginning" (Bhabha 96)—is catalyzed by the fact that the original West Indian colonial enterprise was responsible for literally stripping both the natives and the imported slaves of their historical identities. Within a century of their invasion, the European colonizers virtually annihilated the indigenous Caribs and Arawaks (Ashcroft 26); uprooted Africans from their homeland and shipped them to the Caribbean as slaves (where oftentimes they were separated from other members of their language groups and forced to speak in the language of the plantation owners [27]); and, in the nineteenth century, imported Indian and Chinese natives to the West Indies as "indentured labourers," only to leave them stranded in the Caribbean when return clauses in indenture contracts were not honored (146). Thus deprived of their cultural origins, the colonized peoples were to a great extent forced to "[live] in a borrowed culture" (Naipaul 68) and to accept the biblical story of origin—the creation story—as their own. As subsequent generations passed, the original identities and tales of origin of each culture-
core faded as "black" and "white" races began to mix, creating what has today become an increasingly "creolized" Caribbean culture—a condition that some West Indian writers "see as the chaos, others as the open possibilities of their society" (Ramchand 4).

How is creolization—an inevitable result of the injustices of European colonization—the source of "open possibilities" in West Indian society? It is indeed one of the great ironies of Caribbean literature that the confluence of races (cultural métissage) has become for most Caribbean writers a potential means of escape from the imperial authority of the past, which fomented (and also anathematized) racial hybridization itself. For creolization by nature involves the erosion of the dichotomies (between black and white, master and slave) that the imperial project instituted and perpetuated. Thus, creolization opens the door to a "new" perception of the West Indian situation: as the Barbadian poet and critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite defines it, creolization is "a way of seeing [Caribbean] society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole" (Brathwaite, Development 307). Despite the anti-essentialist vision his concept of hybridity affords (which more and more postcolonial critics are recognizing as the "necessary precondition of the future emergence, at the local level, of healthy Caribbean societies and, at the global level, of a functional world order" [Bongie 54]), Brathwaite also proposes that an (ab)original essence exists at the core of each racial group that remains distinct even when racial groups have mixed. To recover his/her originating "essence," or "nam," the artist must make a "journey into the past and hinterland which is at the same time a movement of possession into present and future" (Brathwaite,
This "journey into the past," which is concomitantly a "movement into the future," is in many respects the essence of Harris's fictional project. If "history is a fiction," as Harris himself states (quoted in Fabre 42), then its "facts" are actually mere "perceptions"—a recognition that allows the poet/artist to re-vision the Caribbean past, re-animate the antagonistic images infecting its history, and view them from a radically different perspective. This is precisely the movement of Palace, as the river crew's journey into the past (backward through Genesis) carries them to a visionary future free of the kinds of polarizations the biblical Genesis narrative institutes. While critics have often stressed the incompatibility of Brathwaite's and Harris's approaches to the quest(ion) of origins, one should not overlook their shared belief that a new age of racial/cultural harmony will emerge only through a backward journey that will catalyze the kind of breakdown of oppositions exemplified by creolization. Like Brathwaite, Harris is primarily concerned with the eradication of oppositions inherent in the colonial discourses of the past, seeing "in the very dissolution of monolithic world structures (including, of course, the dissolution of empire) an opportunity for the renascence of a more 'balanced' civilization" (Maes-Jelinek, "Unfinished Genesis" 237).

How will this "dissolution" begin? Harris proposes that the union of the disparate elements in any given dichotomy will effect their eventual "consumption"; however, this will require the sacrifice of dualistic cognition, those "embedded and cherished habits of thought and feeling perpetuated by frozen tradition" (Adler 37-38). In this sense Harris's vision accords with that of William Blake (to whom he is often compared), who imagined
that the wedding of contraries would bring about the apocalypse and institute the
millennium, the thousand-year reign of the kingdom of God on earth.19 Harris, who uses
a line from a Blake letter as one of Palace’s epigraphs (“It ceases to be history and
becomes [...] fabricated for pleasure, as moderns say, but I say by Inspiration”), also
feels that we live in what could be a "gateway age," that if the "doors of perception were
cleansed" (Blake 73)—if people "could read themselves in a different way and read the
world around them in a different way" (Gilkes, "Landscape" 38)—we would move
through the present age to "an era never before conceived of by man" (Adler 37). Indeed,
Harris holds out as a "dazzling and almost tangible possibility a new creation of the world
and man by man himself" (40).

At this point, one may well ask how, practically speaking, Harris believes the
world will be thus transformed. Certainly the divine task of re-creating the universe so
that its defining dichotomies are conjoined and thereby consumed is beyond the scope of
any literary endeavour. Yet Harris believes the artistic imagination is capable of pre-
figuring such a radical change via the production of (what I here term) a "creolized
fiction," which symbiotically combines words and/or ideas that would traditionally be
considered "opposites." As Gilkes points out, "because he refuses to consider concepts
like 'strong,' 'weak,' 'good' and 'evil,' or even 'actual' and 'fictitious' as self-evident
absolutes or diametrically opposed definitions, Harris's universe . . . is composed of
contraries" (Gilkes, Wilson Harris 3). Thus, Harris's fiction abounds with seeming
paradoxes, such as "I awoke with one dead seeing eye and one living closed eye" (Palace
19), "falling motionlessly" (100), and "he saw the invisible otherness around" (108—my
italics). The narrator of Palace himself concludes that harmony is achieved only through the commingling of opposites:

I had understood that no living ear on earth can truly understand the fortune of love and the art of victory over death without mixing blind joy and sadness and the sense of being lost with the nearness of being found. (114)

How can one speak of oneself as being both lost and found at one and the same time? This is the quest(ion) that Harris poses to his reader.

Harris's unique vision—that the eradication of oppositional thinking will result from the transformation (creolization) of oppositional language—is what ultimately distinguishes his work and thought from that of a late-Victorian writer like Schreiner, who "could formulate no convincing alternatives to the existing colonial order" (Gorak 71), an order based upon binary conceptions. Confronted with this vision, the unwary reader might be tempted to identify it as that of a quintessentially "postmodernist" or "poststructuralist" writer/theoretician—that is, as that of someone whose fictional method suggests that words are not inseparably linked to their "meanings," thus demonstrating the "convertibility of language" [Maes-Jelinek, "Forward" 10]). However, Harris, as is only fitting, resists even this kind of categorization. For him, the universe of games to which art is relegated once signifier and signified are ripped apart is abhorrent:

Art is not a game. It's not the nihilist post-modernist game. I would never go along with post-modernism because, whatever theoretical value it has, art really becomes a game. I have no theories in that sense ... one [can] have a religious
hope. That may seem a strange assertion, that one could have a religious hope.

(quoted in Riach 59)

It is this religious sense that, ultimately, sets Harris apart from the post-Nietzschean world of skeptical thought with which his narratives often seem to overlap.

Attending to this religious sense also provides the final grounds for my reading of Palace as a parody of the biblical creation story. Michael Jagessar has brilliantly argued that "a crucial question for theology in the Caribbean relates to discovering metaphors and symbols through which God can be conceived as the Thou who is related to the world in an interdependent way," as opposed to the concept of God as an outsider, over and above the people. This revision of the conception of God must commence, Jagessar continues, with a radical revision of the language, "a revision which must begin at the level of the imagination. Consequently, there is a need to deconstruct and reconstruct the traditional metaphors and symbols of the Christian faith" (Jagessar 224). Palace, as I have suggested, accomplishes this revision by "deconstructing" the Genesis story and "reconstructing" it through the elimination of its system of oppositions; the creation account is exposed as a "blind dream" and thereby "crumbles as it is re-enacted." Couple this theological position with the fact that Harris's creative project is remarkably similar to that of Christianity (to literally "establish the Kingdom of God on earth" through the creative imagination [Riach 54]), and it indeed seems strange that, as Mark Williams and Alan Riach note, "there has been an embarrassed silence about the religious aspects of [Harris's] writing" (Riach 50).

Before we proceed to Part Two, however, it must be noted that I do not mean to
suggest that Harris himself is a "Christian" in any traditional sense of the word; nor do I mean to argue that Harris draws solely upon biblical imagery in *Palace*. Indeed, the seven-day river journey may be read in any one of many contexts (fittingly, given its creolized nature). Hena Maes-Jelinek, Sandra Drake, and Antonio Benitez-Rojo have thoroughly treated Harris's evocation of the quest for the mythic El Dorado, the "quintessential myth of the post-Columbian Caribbean" (Drake 5); Michael Gilkes offers a brilliant reading of the seven-day river journey as the seven stages of the alchemical process (Gilkes, *Wilson Harris* 36-40); and Drake has discussed the various images from Amerindian and African folk lore at work in *Palace* as well as numerous references to Eastern religious ideas and symbols (Drake 49-70). Certainly one could read this commingling of Western and non-Western religious and mythic images in *Palace* as another way in which Harris "creolizes" his fiction.

Finally, when addressing Harris's fiction it is imperative to recognize that his aesthetic program is ultimately a field of experiment in which nothing is ever final or complete. To say that Harris has "achieved" anything in his fiction—that he has "successfully" overcome the language of dichotomies—would be once again to fall into the trap of binary discourse, as "success" implies its opposite. Harris has called fiction writing an "infinite rehearsal," a continual practicing and refining of technique for a "production" that, paradoxically, the players know will never materialize. The critic must "finally" conclude that nothing in Harris is final; in *Palace*, inasmuch as Harris succeeds in de- and re-creating the biblical creation story, we must inevitably read it—and the rest of his oeuvre—as an "unfinished Genesis" (Harris, *Four Banks* 9).
And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing.

Olive Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm*

Harris’s concept of an “unfinished Genesis,” a positive envisioning of a never completed creative project, recalls and echoes Schreiner’s earlier lament that, at the end of her life and *oeuvre*, she was “only a broken and untried possibility” (Cronwright-Schreiner, *Letters* 227). Had Schreiner been able to embrace this condition as creative (as did Harris) rather than lament it (one thinks of Beckett’s paradoxically optimistic admonition to “fail better”), perhaps her fiction, like that of Harris, would have come closer to escaping the kind of dualistic ideology from which she so longed to be free. However, in even attempting to purge the biases inherent in her culture and language, Olive Schreiner was well before her time. As mentioned above, much of the negative appraisal of *Story of an African Farm* has stemmed from the fact that critics have examined it in the light of other late-nineteenth-century, Victorian novels. It is time to view Schreiner’s *Story* through a new postcolonial critical lens.
In what is still very much a standard study on the general character of the Victorian age, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1830-1870), Walter Houghton describes the almost alarming exultation with which many Victorians cast off their Christian faith in favor of science:

The new vision of a ‘scientific’ universe was a nightmare--and it was a glorious dream, as men discovered that much or all of dogmatic Christianity was sheer superstition, thank God, and looked forward, with joyful anticipation in some cases, to a new revelation of man’s destiny. To put the situation another way, if modernism for most Victorians threatened to destroy the comforts of belief, for a substantial minority it promised to end the discomforts of belief. (Houghton 48)

Houghton goes on to delineate two specific discomforts the shedding of faith “relieved” for the Victorian thinker: the intellectual and emotional burdens the Christian faith placed on the believer. Intellectually, he says, it was difficult, if not impossible, for many Victorians to accept the “miraculous character of Christian theology: the story of creation in Genesis, the incarnation, the virgin birth . . . A liberal effort to free the mind from these ‘Hebrew old clothes’ seemed to many thinkers the major need of the age” (48-49). Further, the emotional fear of damnation, the inability to reconcile the “conception of a jealous God of wrath, punishing most of the human race with eternal torture in hell” (51) with a God of love, the Calvinist idea of human nature, “innately corrupt and powerless to attain salvation except by an act of divine grace,” and the corresponding “anxious self-
examination in a frantic effort to determine whether one was among the elect or the damned” (51) all led to the formation of a context of “living fear from which any escape, even at the cost of all religious faith, might seem at times a blessed event” (51).

It is indeed indicative of Schreiner’s Victorian “frame of mind” that, despite her foreign location, it is precisely these two “discomforts”—the intellectual and the emotional—that inform and direct her structural revisions of Genesis in the middle space of Story, the “Times and Seasons” chapter. On the one hand, her “failed” revision of Genesis One (which ultimately rejects God for science/Nature itself) speaks to the intellectual credulity she felt must accompany belief in such “miraculous” biblical accounts; on the other, the presence of the seeming dichotomy between God’s wrath and love in “Times and Seasons” (and her eventual abandonment of either conception of God in favor of Nature) speaks to the emotional fears instilled by her rearing and instruction in her mother’s Calvinist faith. Further, her very inclusion of the idea of God’s wrath (in the Bible, a result of Adam’s sin in Genesis Three) in an allegory that is ostensibly concerned with the first chapter of Genesis points to the novel’s postcolonial condition: “new beginnings” (like a colony) will always be “contaminated” by what has gone before, by what has already begun (in a colony, the pre-existing indigenous and colonial cultures “get in the way” of an absolute beginning; in “Times and Seasons,” the entirety of scripture and its teachings on justice/mercy “gets in the way” of Schreiner’s attempt to write a new beginning).

Indeed, questionings that derive from both the intellectual and emotional modes of discomfort surface from the outset of the novel. Before entering into a detailed
discussion, however, some background to the novel and its plot and characters will be helpful. *The Story of an African Farm*, published in 1883 by Chapman and Hall after it was recommended by their reader, George Meredith, is set in pre-industrial South Africa (circa 1858-1867). Most of the narrative takes place on the African farm, with its cast of characters functioning as a “microcosm of the polyglot culture of South Africa” (Monsman 49). The central characters on the farm represent the confluence of various races/nationalities: Old Otto, the simple-minded German overseer, is father to the dark, brooding Waldo, the tragic hero of the novel (who in many ways recalls Emily Bronte’s Heathcliff). Tant Sannie, the “boorish” Boer (Dutch) owner of the farm, and Bonaparte Blenkins, the Irish charlatan who attempts to seduce her in order to steal the farm, serve as comic foils to the rest of the characters. Tant Sannie’s English stepdaughter, Em (whose father owned the farm before his death), is cousin to Lyndall, the tragic feminist heroine whose denunciation of traditional sex roles and male domination has led critics to class her as one of the earliest sympathetic portrayals of the “New Woman” (48).

Another significant character (though he resists classification as either tragic or comic) is Gregory Rose, who surfaces in Part Two as Lyndall’s would-be lover, but who eventually gets in touch with his decidedly feminine nature by cross-dressing as a nurse in order to be close to the dying heroine. And, never far in the background, a host of subservient “Kaffirs” and “Hottentots” appear, completing the picture of the primary social units in mid-nineteenth-century South Africa.

The bipartite novel tells primarily two stories: Waldo’s story in Part One, Lyndall’s story in Part Two (although we continue to glimpse Waldo throughout Part
Two, as we get glimpses of Lyndall throughout Part One). Waldo and Lyndall serve, respectively, as the narrative mouthpieces through which Schreiner voices her religious and feminist concerns: thus, Part One details Waldo's spiritual crisis of belief in, and eventual disgust and disillusionment with, the religious beliefs of his father Otto; Part Two traces Lyndall's contempt for patriarchal society and assertion of her own sexual liberation. At first glance, the novel's bipartite division seems to suggest a textual parallel to the Old/New Testament structure of the Bible. Indeed, the opening pages of the novel immediately evoke (what the novel will continually depict as) the Old Testament God of wrath, as Waldo lies awake, listening to the inexorable ticking of his father's watch and pondering the irrevocable, unchangeable will of God in sending countless souls into the pit of hell:

The boy lay with his eyes wide open. He saw before him a long stream of people, a great dark multitude, that moved in one direction; then they came to the dark edge of the world, and went over . . . And all the while the watch kept ticking on; just like God's will, that never changes or alters, you may do what you please.

(Story 37)

Moreover, the farm in Part One—ruled by the domineering hand of Bonaparte Blenkins, a vagabond who arrives on the farm in Chapter Three and proceeds, through lies and deception (taking advantage of Tant Sannie's and Otto's ignorance and credulity), to usurp Otto's place as overseer and become schoolmaster to the girls—also ignites images of Old Testament Israel, where the Letter of the Law ruled, often to the exclusion of mercy. By contrast, the farm in Part Two, in which Bonaparte has been expelled from the
farm (after Tant Sannie catches him seducing her niece) and the gentler and more feminine hands of Tant Sannie, Em, and the cross-dressing Gregory Rose have taken charge of it, ostensibly recalls the New Testament world where the old Jewish patriarch has been displaced and an (ultimately illusory) freedom and equality reigns—a "freedom" that might lure one into believing, as it were, that on the farm "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Yet this surface reading, on closer examination, quickly falls apart, as Part One displays a contaminatory mixing together of both Old and New Testament stories/perspectives—their "miscegenation," to use the pejorative term; or, their "creolization," to speak from the more positive perspective of someone like Harris. Despite this mixing of Old and New Testament stories, however, at the end of Part One the figures of Old (divine justice) and New (divine mercy) Testaments remain in binary opposition to one another in the characters of Blenkins and Otto, as discussed below (thereby necessitating a new Genesis, which materializes in "Times and Seasons").

We first see this commingling (and thus effective dismantling) of Old and New Testaments in the subsection of the novel's first chapter entitled "The Sacrifice," where Waldo conflates Old and New Testament prayers as he offers a mutton chop before the Lord on a rough-hewn altar of twelve stones (a number that evokes the twelve tribes of Israel). He calls out and asks God, like the Old Testament Elijah before the prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 18:16-40), to "send fire down from heaven to burn it" (Story 40), although where Elijah offers a bull Waldo can only supply a mutton chop—a good
example of the “inferiority” of colonial mimesis (from one perspective) or (from another) its parodicity. Waldo then continues, “Thou hast said, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast into the sea, nothing doubting, it shall be done” (40). This recalls Christ’s words in Matthew 17:20, “if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move.”

However, unlike the God of the Old Testament who does indeed send fire down from heaven to consume the offering, Waldo’s God remains silent, and Waldo, after waiting till sunset and watching the mutton chop merely melt over the stones in the heat, “broke down the altar, and threw the meat far, far away into the field” (41). He concludes, in an ironic recoding of the account of Elijah (where Elijah and the Baal worshippers finally affirm the existence and sovereignty of God: “The Lord—he is God!” [1 Kings 18:39]), “I am like Cain—I am not His. He will not hear my prayer. God hates me” (41). Thus, Schreiner mixes the Old Testament story of Elijah’s faith with the New Testament Christological teaching on faith, and ends up with a parodic outcome: Waldo, who like Elijah affirms God’s existence and sovereignty, pictures himself as being outside of God’s love; in Calvinistic terms, he sees himself as being one of the damned. Schreiner’s conflation of Old and New Testament texts here thus has the effect of introducing the very dichotomy between God’s love and his wrath that is central to the novel.

This dichotomy is again evoked on the page following the mutton chop non-miracle, where Waldo confesses (in yet another Old Testament/New Testament commingling): “I love Jesus Christ, but I hate God” (42). But this privileging of one
conception of God (the Son who offers mercy) over another (the Father who demands justice) is fraught with irony, if only because the New Testament teaches in no uncertain terms that Jesus Christ is God, the familiar concept of the Incarnation (cf. John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”). Waldo’s “confession” that he loves Christ (mercy) but hates God (judgement) relies on a binary opposition, an either/or, that the biblical doctrine of Christ’s propitiation undoes (see my Conclusion). This “confession” (“I hate God”) also points to the arrival of the hated Bonaparte Blenkins, who is Waldo’s Old Testament God personified, and the Irishman’s juxtaposition with Waldo’s real father Otto, who represents the Jesus Christ whom Waldo “loves.” Thus, Bonaparte Blenkins and Otto represent the Old and New Testaments, judging God versus merciful Christ, respectively—an ironic reversal of biblical “order,” inasmuch as Bonaparte is a new, intrusive presence on the farm who displaces its old caretaker.

Gerald Monsman has noted that the figure of Blenkins is a “mythic/parodic representation of patriarchal power” (Monsman 61), as indeed he is: overseer, schoolmaster, preacher of death and damnation. During his Sunday sermon he relates the ridiculous tale of how he climbed to the top of a seething volcano, Mt. Etna, and peered down inside to witness the churning skeleton of a man who committed suicide over a lost love upon a “lake of fire and brimstone” (Story 71). He tells this obvious lie in the midst of preaching a sermon on the topic, “All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (70). Besides the obvious irony (he lies to illustrate his point), we note the lack of any New Testament rhetoric of
forgiveness for sins; Bonaparte is firmly ensconced within (what is viewed as) an Old Testament rhetoric of adherence to the letter of the law, and within a vision of the world that sees in the “second death” (ironically, a New Testament idea [cf. Revelation 20:14]) a definitive ending, rather than the opportunity for a new beginning with which, as we have seen, Harris associates it.

Bonaparte is further linked to the Old Testament God in the Garden of Eden when he questions Waldo about the young man’s frequent visits to the loft. After Otto’s death (Tant Sannie sends Otto away because she believes the lies Blenkins tells about him, but just before he is to leave Otto dies peacefully—and somewhat pathetically—in his sleep), Waldo discovers a set of books in the loft that once belonged to Em’s father. Blenkins, who after Otto’s demise assumes the role of father to Waldo, decides that, since there is neither alcohol nor a woman up in the loft, Waldo must be eating Tant Sannie’s dried peaches (even though Tant Sannie muses, “He must have been a great fool to eat my peaches . . . they are full of mites as a sheepskin, and as hard as stones” [121]). In a confrontation that alludes to God’s confrontation with Adam in the Garden after he had eaten of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (but note the ironic displacement from fresh fruit to dried), Bonaparte demands, “Waldo, answer me . . . have you, or have you not, did you, or did you not, eat of the peaches in the loft?” (122). He then announces Waldo’s punishment by confinement: “It will enable you, Waldo, to reflect on the enormity of the sin you have committed against our Father in heaven” (123), again linking the episode to Adam’s Fall. Here, as Monsman points out, “Blenkins’s fatherhood and God’s are inseparable—fraudulent and tyrannical” (Monsman
Blenkins is again portrayed as a merciless, judging "father" when he beats Waldo for "stealing" the peaches: "'Chasten thy son while there is hope,'" he says before casting the first blow, "'and let not thy soul spare for his crying.' Those are God's words. I shall act as a father to you, Waldo" (124). Obviously, this "act" does not succeed; Bonaparte's hypocrisy is soon exposed when Tant Sannie, whom Bonaparte has been courting, witnesses him seducing her young niece Trana and pours a barrel of pickled mutton chops onto his head at the climax of his passionate lovemaking (a rather more effective use of mutton chops than Waldo's, one might note!). Bonaparte is thus mercifully sent away, with the ironic last words spoken to Waldo, "May the blessing of my God and my father's God rest on you, now and evermore" (133–my italics).

Bonaparte's final words call to mind Waldo's earthly father, Otto, who is set in diametrical opposition to Blenkins and embodies the grace and mercy of the New Testament Jesus Christ. Otto is perpetually "turning the other cheek," doing good unto his enemies (e.g., giving his Sunday suit and sermon to Blenkins), and living as a "Good Samaritan." The obvious allusion to this parable (Luke 10:30-37) occurs when Otto finds the wife of the Kaffir herdsman (who has been "turned out" because twenty sheep are discovered missing; we later learn that Blenkins was responsible) lying next to a milk-bush with her infant tied to her back. After ascertaining that the Kaffir woman had been "turned away" unjustly, he returns with food and gives her his "old brown salt-and-pepper coat" (88). Otto is here equated with the Samaritan in Christ's parable, who is deemed a "neighbor" to the battered stranger (left for dead along the side of the road from
Jerusalem to Jericho) because he “shewed mercy on him” (Luke 10:37). Even when Tant Sannie sends Otto away due to Bonaparte’s lies, the old man neither resists nor places blame; he merely composes a pathetically optimistic letter to Lyndall and Em, exhorting them to “serve the Saviour; give your hearts to Him while you are yet young. Life is short” (94).

Yet, for all his goodness and innocence, Otto—the parodic embodiment of New Testament Christological mercy—is a senescent fool. He is naive in his charity; it never occurs to him that the Kaffir woman to whom he gives his cloak “would creep back to the huts at the homestead when the darkness favoured her” (88). He is blind to Blenkins’s duplicitous nature; indeed, he takes Christ’s teaching that “inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40) to the literal extreme as he gazes upon Blenkins’s sleeping form: “He [Otto] saw not the bloated body nor the evil face of the man; but, as it were, under deep disguise and fleshly concealment, the form that long years of dreaming had made very real to him. ‘Jesus, lover . . . to serve Thee, to take Thee in!’” (57). Significantly, it is “dreaming” that makes Christ real to him, and not fact; Otto is unable to dissociate the dream and the reality. Indeed, for him there may be no difference between the two, between a story and a fact: when Lyndall asks him how he knows the stories Blenkins tells are true, his ire is aroused and he cries out, “‘That is what I do hate! . . . Know that is true! How do you know that anything is true? Because you are told so . . . How do you know that God talked to Moses, except that Moses wrote it?’” (62). Finally, he takes his “turn the other cheek” credo too far when Tant Sannie exiles him from the farm; as he prepares to leave all his
possessions save one small bundle "he never thought of entering a protest against the loss
of his goods: like a child he submitted, and wept" (94). Rachel Blau Duplessis has
observed that, through the parodic Christ-figure of Otto, Schreiner "exploits the literal
perversity of such extreme faith" and "propounds the blasphemous notion that to live
uncritically according to the literal Christian story is to put the devil in power" (Blau
Duplessis 22). If, as Christ tells his disciples when he "sends them out like sheep among
the wolves," Christians are to be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves"
(Matthew 10:16), Otto falls pathetically short on the former count.

Thus, at the end of Part One Waldo (and, by extension, the reader) is left in a
world where both the (parodic versions of the) Old and New Testament Gods have been
displaced: the former expelled from the Garden himself, the latter dead, never to rise
again. At the end of Part One Waldo no longer hates God, but quite simply denies his
existence: "'There is no God!' he almost hissed; 'no God; not anywhere!'" (102). After
being exposed to all this negation in Part One, the reader could hardly be surprised by the
tone of the epigraph that opens Part Two, but might well be in a better position to decode
its relevance to the Bible: "And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived
and worked for. A striving [Blenkins/Old Testament justice], and a striving [Otto/New
Testament mercy], and an ending in nothing" (135–my brackets).

The useless striving of the various fathers and sons in Part One makes room, in
Part Two, for a narrative centered around Lyndall; feminist critics have picked up on this
aspect of the novel and its attempt (in Blau Duplessis's words) to go "beyond the ending"
of conventional patriarchal scripts to which nineteenth-century women writers were
condemned. But I will be focusing on the novel’s structural center, the anomalous chapter “Times and Seasons,” an ambivalent middle passage between its two gendered parts that depicts, in seven separate stages, the spiritual and intellectual growth of a child’s mind from infancy through childhood. In the seven sections of this chapter, Schreiner attempts to “re-create” religious belief; it is her own “Genesis” of sorts. This “beginning,” coming at the halfway point of the novel, suggests the colonial condition itself, as colonial cultures (which conceive of themselves, as I have argued, as Genesis-like experiments in the creation of new worlds, just as Schreiner’s chapter is an experiment in the creation of a new religious order) always begin in the middle. While attempting to be “new,” they actually interrupt an existing narrative and extend another narrative (itself already “old”) over top of it. In this sense, as I have argued, the colonial culture/text will always-already contain elements of the postcolonial, as will be evidenced by the failure of Schreiner’s allegorization of Genesis One to conform to (or entirely escape) its original model.

Perhaps it is only fitting, then, to begin discussing the “Times and Seasons” chapter in its own middle with Schreiner’s depiction of a (failed) allegorical reading of the Bible. In stage four of the seven-part narrative, the child (who remains nameless, although most critics agree that he is most likely Waldo himself), assailed by religious doubt, “yearn[s] for a token from the inexorably silent one” (Storv 142). He grabs the Bible, puts his finger down on a page, and bends to read, confident that what he will encounter is the very voice of God speaking directly to his heart. With bated breath the child looks down and reads, “‘Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with
Barnabas, and took Titus with me also” (143). The child’s imagination “seizes it for a moment: we are twisting, twirling, trying to make an allegory” (143). But a sudden loathing comes to him as he realizes the futility of his efforts; “we seize the book, swing it round our head, and fling it with all our might to the farther end of the room. We put down our head again and weep” (143).

The child’s failed attempt to make an allegory out of a biblical passage that resists allegorization, which on the literal level simply pictures Waldo’s acute religious strife, is almost eerily self-reflexive as it images failed allegorical reading within a “failed” allegorical reading. As I have begun to argue, the seven-stage allegory is structurally disordered (and thus “fails”) in two ways: its seven days are “out of order,” initially offering only a very loose parallel with, and eventually failing to parallel at all, the seven days of creation outlined in Genesis One; and the dichotomy between divine justice and mercy raised in the chapter is “out of order” as these ideas are not a part of Genesis One but are first raised later, in Genesis Three, where God’s wrath manifests itself only after Adam and Eve succumb to the serpent’s wiles and, contrary to God’s will, eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The very chapter title, “Times and Seasons,” is itself “out of order” as it hearkens to yet another passage of scripture that comes after Genesis in the Old Testament, the oft-quoted verse in the book of Ecclesiastes, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). This statement comes at the end of King Solomon’s (the psuedonymous author) reflection on the vanity of all things, a two-chapter revisititation of his life’s work, in which he determines that the strivings of his entire life
have been in vain: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). Thus the chapter (in which we expect to “begin anew”) in effect begins at/with the end, which ironically situates (indeed, contaminates) the seven-stage narrative that follows.

Schreiner now engages in a depiction of these seven stages of the psyche’s development, which she likens to times and seasons: “The soul’s life has seasons of its own; periods not found in any calendar, times that years and months will not scan” (137). Recalling the allusion to Ecclesiastes, in which the “times and seasons” of life have been pronounced “vanity of vanities,” we begin to get a sense of the direction the seven stages will take. The first stage (infancy) seems, at first, loosely to parallel the first day of creation in Genesis, upon which God creates light: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night” (Gen. 1:3-5a). Similarly, the infant in stage one is separating light from darkness: “from the shadowy background of forgetfulness start out pictures of startling clearness, disconnected, but brightly colored, and indelibly printed in the mind” (Story 137). Note, however, that the infant in this stage is not acting (as is God in the Genesis narrative) but is a passive participant in the process. “Light” and “dark” binaries abound as various pictures from the natural world start out and become permanently, “startlingly,” impressed upon the infant’s mind (in an almost Wordsworthian, “spots of time” fashion), like the “warm summer’s evening” when “we have yet the taste of bread and milk in our mouth, and the red sunset is reflected in our basin” (137); or the “dark night” when the
child wakes with the "fear that there is some great being in the room" (137). Schreiner even invokes the image of the rainbow (the visible manifestation of light itself) in this stage, saying it is the picture that "starts out more vividly than any" (138). However, here the narrative again departs structurally from its model, as the image of light is already "contaminated" by the image of the rainbow, which is not introduced in the Bible until Genesis Nine. Moreover, the rainbow is a sign of the covenant God makes with Noah and "every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations" (9:12) that "neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (9:11). The image of the rainbow thus necessarily conjures up the dichotomy between God's wrath (i.e., he destroyed the world because of the proliferation of wickedness [cf. Gen. 6:5-6]) and his mercy (i.e., he promises to never destroy the earth in this manner again).

This dichotomy begins to manifest itself more and more clearly in the subsequent stages/days of development, even as the already loose parallel to the creation story begins to dissipate further. On the biblical second day of creation, God causes a great separation between the sky and the water:24 "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven" (Gen. 1:5-8; in the NIV, "Heaven" is translated "sky"). In Schreiner's second stage, the reader strains to find the sort of parallels that seemed to offer themselves up in the first stage. The child does become aware of his own separation from the surrounding material world
(“Material things still rule, but the spiritual and intellectual take their places” [Story 138]), and he does develop a concept of self while looking up at the sky (“One day we sit there and look up at the blue sky, and down at our fat little knees; and suddenly it strikes us, Who are we? This I, what is it?” [139—note again, as with the binaries between light and dark in stage one, stage two also posits binary distinctions: matter vs. spirit, self vs. other]). However, it is a stretch to say that this section in any way directly parallels the biblical second day of creation. In the Bible, the firmament (sky) is placed over the material world (the water below); in Schreiner’s stage two, the material world “still rules.” Furthermore, whereas in Genesis God is actively engaged in the creation of the sky, in stage two the child is depicted as the passive receptor of a suggestion (namely, his own separation from the surrounding material world) that is prompted by his contemplation of the sky.

Indeed, the more striking issue that comes into play in this stage is the introduction of fear into the child’s psyche: “We try to look in upon ourself, and ourself beats back upon ourself. Then we get up in great fear and run home as hard as we can. We can’t tell what frightened us” (139); or again, on a dark night, “when we are afraid, we pray and shut our eyes. We press our fingers very hard upon the lids, and see dark spots moving round and round, and we know they are heads and wings of angels sent to take care of us . . . It is very consoling” (138). The concept of fear is nowhere present in Genesis One, but is one of the first results of the Fall in Genesis Three (Adam and Eve, fearing God’s wrath, “hid[e] themselves from the presence of the Lord God” [3:8] after they eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil). Thus, in stage two we
again encounter the two structural "failures" we identified at the outset of this thesis: 1) it does not adhere in any obvious way to the events of Day Two in Genesis, and 2) it is contaminated by an idea introduced only later in Genesis, and thus is "disordered" in terms of the original biblical structure.

This structural disorder continues into the third day/stage as well, which, like the first two stages, departs significantly from the biblical third day of creation (and almost seems to begin to invert the parallels). In the biblical creation narrative, life begins to flourish ("waters under the heaven [are] gathered together unto one place" [1:9], dry land appears, and vegetation is produced ["And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind"] [1:12]). Here, significantly, the author of Genesis makes it clear that God created life to contain within itself the ability to re-generate (through its seed). But, whereas the events of the biblical Day Three suggest perpetual regeneration, Schreiner's narrative suggests the opposite as the child's questions begin to focus on perpetual damnation:

Occasionally, also, unpleasantly shrewd questions begin to be asked by someone, we know not who, who sits behind our shoulder . . . we carry the questions to the grown-up people . . . and they say it was kind of God to make hell, and very loving of Him to send men there; and besides, He couldn't help himself; and they are very wise, we think, so we believe them—more or less. (140)

Even the child's religiosity is motivated by the fear of damnation: "At night we are profoundly religious; even the ticking watch says 'Eternity, eternity! Hell, hell, hell!'" (140).
The child’s questions in this stage are not only indicative of the way in which ideas introduced in future chapters of Genesis (the idea of punishment for evil in a place of eternal damnation; i.e., Hell) infiltrate Schreiner’s version of Genesis One, but they also raise what most see as the central problem in the Genesis creation narrative itself (indeed, what is perhaps the most pressing theological/philosophical question raised in the Bible): where does evil come from in a creation that is all good? After all, at the end of his work God pronounces all he has made good: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Schreiner’s narrative thus reveals itself as nicely self-reflexive once again; using the Genesis framework, she raises the crucial theological problem with the Genesis account itself (how could good beget evil?). Thus, the binary divisions between good and evil, merciful and damning God, become increasingly stark, evidenced again in the way the child in this stage draws a strict division between the Old and New testaments: after reading Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 ff.), the child asserts, “The Ten Commandments and the old ‘Thou Shalt’ we have heard about long enough, and don’t care about it; but this new law sets us on fire” (139).

These binary distinctions between old and new, judging and loving, hell and heaven, most obviously “contaminate” stage four, which is the last of Schreiner’s stages to retain even loose (and ironically inverted) structural parallels to the Genesis account. On day four in the Bible, God creates the heavenly realms (“And God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also” [Genesis 1:16]). Yet again, Schreiner’s narrative parodically recodes the
Genesis narrative: while sunlight imagery does abound on Schreiner's fourth “day,” it serves to remind the child not of the “vault of heaven” but of hell:

We look at the walls of the farm-house . . . with the merry sunshine playing over all, and do not see it. But we see a great white throne, and Him that sits on it . . . And the music rises higher, and rends the vault of heaven with its unutterable sweetness. And we, as we listen, ever and anon, as it sinks on the sweetest, lowest note, hear a groan of the damned from below. We shudder in the sunlight.

(140)

It is also in the sunlight that the child remembers Jeremy Taylor’s sermons on the torments of hell (the “real fire of which this temporal fire [i.e. the sun] is but a painted fire” [140-41]) and concludes in the face of such inexorable torment, “what matter sunshine and walls, men and sheep? The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (141) 25 Once again, Schreiner revises the Genesis account by both recalling the biblical narrative (via sunlight imagery) and ironically departing from that narrative (i.e, the sunlight recalls hell, not the “firmament of heaven” in which God places the sun).

The fourth stage is also, like the preceding three, infiltrated by the dichotomy, nowhere present in Genesis One, between a loving and judging God. Indeed, the “shrewd questions” pertaining to the existence of evil in the world are now “asked louder. We carry them to the grown-up people; they answer us, and we are not satisfied” (140). The Devil (thought not to be introduced in the Bible until Genesis 3:1) is identified as the one who sat “behind [the] shoulder” of the child in stage three and provoked the “shrewd
questions:” “the Devil walks with us... He is never silenced—without mercy. Though the drops of blood stand out on your heart he will put his questions... ‘Is it good of God to make hell? Was it kind of Him to let no one be forgiven unless Jesus Christ died?’” (141). Not only does the child recognize the dichotomy between a loving and damning God, but he also confronts the dichotomy between God’s goodness and his own innate depravity (again, a concept not understood to be introduced in Genesis until after the Fall): “God is good, very good. We are wicked, very wicked... Too vile to live, too vile to die, too vile to creep over this, God’s earth, and move among His believing men” (142). The “Devil” finally forces the child to face the Calvinist doctrine of the predestination of the elect: “Is it right there should be a chosen people? To Him, who is father to all, should not all be dear?” (142). It is no wonder that this is the point at which the child, like Schreiner herself, “flings” the Bible across the room; the allegory of creation (s)he is looking for is faltering structurally as it both proves incapable of one-to-one mimesis and becomes increasingly contaminated by binary distinctions that ought to have no place in her (re)created Genesis, since they are raised only in later chapters of the Bible.

From this point on, Schreiner’s narrative structure departs entirely from the Genesis text as the child/Schreiner begins to looks for a “way out” of the oppositional dichotomies presented in the first four stages. In the Genesis creation text, the oppositional hierarchies continue through the fifth and sixth days, as God creates animals and man (giving humans dominion over the “fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth” [1:26]; he then commands man and woman to
"replenish the earth, and subdue it" [1:28]). God finally rests on the seventh day (and even privileges this day over the others, blessing and sanctifying it [2:3]). Schreiner's day of rest, however, is alarmingly displaced to day five: "Before us there were three courses possible—to go mad, to die, to sleep. We take the latter course; or Nature takes it for us" (144—note that the supernatural [God] is replaced here by Nature). Instead of being created, the "beasts, birds, the very flowers close their eyes, and the streams are still in winter; all things take rest; then why not the human reason also?" (144-45). Indeed, the Devil himself rests (in yet another radical revision of the Genesis text, where only God is present): "So the questioning Devil in us drops asleep" (145).

This displaced day of rest is perhaps the most obvious structural departure in the chapter; and the "contamination" of the allegory continues even here, as the sleeping soul dreams of an all-loving, all-beneficent Christ—obviously a New Testament figure (although the Bible itself holds that the pre-incarnate Christ was present and active at the creation [cf. John 1:1]). The child has not been able to reconcile the dichotomy between a vengeful God and merciful Christ in his waking hours; he now attempts (for the last time, and only in the context of a dream) to retain a vestige of religious hope by privileging the merciful deity over the judging one. Initially, the child "find[s] Him in everything in those days" (145), and "laughs" when the "poor sleepy, half-dead Devil" rears his head with his old questions. The child sees in the "purple flowers" the eyes of Christ (145); feels he is holding Christ himself when he carries home the "little weary lamb" (145); and has compassion on the "drunken Kaffir" lying on the roadside in the sun, covering him with a blanket ("[God's] Kaffir; why should the sun hurt him?" [145]).
The child goes on to reconceive the biblical God (who places his judgement—i.e., death—upon all his creation as a consequence for Adam's disobedience in Genesis Three) as a Being who shows only mercy toward his creation:

> In the centre of all things is a Mighty Heart, which, having begotten all things, loves them; and, having born them into life, beats with great throbs of love toward them. No death for His dear insects, no hell for His dear men, no burning up for His dear world—His own, own world that He has made. (145)

This dream quickly turns to nightmare, however, as the child cannot entirely banish the concept of a judging deity from his mind, and finally rejects both the damning and merciful concepts of God entirely. Attending church with his father, the child listens to the preacher's sermon upon the text, "'He that believeth not shall be damned.'" The child knows the preacher's words refer to the soul of the "magistrate's clerk," who professed to be an atheist and who "just the day before . . . had died in the street, struck by lightning" (146). As the preacher goes on to describe the outpouring of the wrath of the "Mighty One, whose existence [the clerk] had denied" and the damned soul's flight into the "everlasting shade," the child becomes enraged:

> He lies! . . . That man in the pulpit lies! Will no one stop him? Have none of them heard—do none of them know, that when the poor dark soul shut its eyes on earth it opened them in the still light of heaven? that there is no wrath where God's face is? . . . While the atheist lay wondering and afraid, God bent down and said, 'My child, here I am . . . Then the poor soul turned to the light,—its weakness and pain were gone forever. (146-47)
Yet the child recognizes, even in the midst of his anger, that this idea of an all-merciful God is his own: when his father jolts him out of his angry reverie, the child admits he can "see nothing but [his] own ideas" (147). Indeed, in an earlier authorial interposition (in which Schreiner switches from present to past tense narrative), the soul cries, "Jesus! You Jesus of our dream! How we loved you; no Bible tells of you as we knew you" (145–my italics). The child can now only awaken to what he has determined to be the "truth": the non-existence of either of his previous versions of God.

This "awakening" occurs simultaneously in the next two sections, stages six and seven, which Schreiner conflates in her allegorical version of Genesis (i.e., both stages chronicle the child's "time of waking" [148]). Again, this is another structural deviation from the biblical narrative, in which the creation of animals and humans occurs on day six, while God finally rests "from all his work which [he] created and made" on the seventh day (Genesis 2:3). In Schreiner's account, the soul awakens in a manner that echoes the creation of man in Genesis 2:7 (note again, her Genesis One creation narrative is infiltrated by an event from Genesis Two), where God crafts Adam out of dust and breathes life into his nostrils: "now life takes us up between her finger and thumb, shakes us furiously . . . and she sets us down a little hardly on the bare earth, bruised and sore, but preternaturally wide awake" (148). Here, anticipating the gender dynamics of Part Two, the patriarchal God of Genesis has been displaced by a feminine entity; and, unlike Adam, who wakes to the natural world in the Garden of Eden, the soul in Schreiner's account is "preternaturally" wide awake (suggesting that the soul has some kind of awareness that is outside of, or above, the natural realm). It is also ironic that, where
Adam awakens to life, Schreiner’s soul awakens to death, as life begins to show it “new-made graves . . . eyes that we love with worms eating them” (148). God is nowhere to be found in the garden of Schreiner’s sixth and seventh stages: “we cry to our beautiful dream-god . . . now in our hour of need be near us. But He is not there; He is gone away” (149). It is indeed as if God himself--both the judging and merciful versions--have been cast out of Schreiner’s garden, as is obvious in the opening of section seven:

Now we have no God. We have had two: the old God that our fathers handed down to us, that we hated, and never liked; the new one that we made for ourselves, that we loved; but now he has flitted away from us, and we see what he was made of--the shadow of our highest ideal, crowned and throned. Now we have no God. (149)

Indeed, the only “God” present throughout the rest of the novel is Nature, personified as a female. It is only after the eradication of both diametrically opposing (just and merciful) conceptions of the Deity that the soul can truly “see” nature: “And now we turn to Nature. All these years we have lived beside her, and we have never seen her: now we open our eyes and look at her” (151). The soul becomes aware of the processes of evolution (and thus of another, secular creation story, Darwin’s, to rival the old, sacred one): “we look down and see [the stone] covered with the fossil footprints of great birds, and the beautiful skeleton of a fish” (152). Significantly, in stage seven the child himself displaces God as Creator: “We put a brown seed in the earth, and a living thing starts out--starts upwards . . . shaking brown seeds with little embryo souls onto the ground” (152-53; note the ironic echoes of the seed-bearing plants on the third day in Genesis).
The soul recognizes a transcendental unity in all things, "not a chance jumble; a living thing, a One" (153). This holistic (and almost Harris-like) concept of the interrelatedness of all things allows the (now adult) soul to conclude (in a vision of the world resembling that of Ecclesiastes in its recognition of the cyclical nature of all things, but drawing an opposite conclusion as to the "vanity" [or "meaninglessness," NIV] of these cycles):

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 round reverentially. Nothing is despicable—all is meaningful; nothing is small—all is part of a whole, whose beginning and end we know not. (154—my italics)

This "new life" envisioned in the seventh section is one that knows neither beginnings nor ends, but that nonetheless makes sense, precisely because it is positioned squarely in the middle of the novel.

It would seem, then, that Schreiner, through this ultimately parodic recoding of the Genesis One story (the inherent binarism of which is further emphasized by the contaminatory presence of the justice/mercy dichotomy, which was not originally part of that story) into a new, organic worldview, has managed to escape the dualistic thinking and language of her colonial/Victorian era. Yet Part Two of the novel, which traces Lyndall’s return to the farm, clandestine relationship with (and pregnancy by) an unnamed stranger, tragic illness following the death of her infant, and her own eventual death, remains fraught with the kinds of black and white dualisms Schreiner attempted to overthrow in both Part One and the “Times and Seasons” chapter.

This is perhaps most evident in Schreiner’s continued treatment of the African
natives as “things” and “animals” in Part Two. As Lyndall and Gregory Rose sit together on the “kopje,” for instance, Gregory begs her to talk to him in the same serious way she does with Waldo. Lyndall falls to observing a Kaffir man at the foot of the kopje:

... he is a splendid fellow—six feet high, with a magnificent pair of legs. In his leather bag he is going to fetch his rations, and I suppose to kick his wife with his beautiful legs when he gets home. He has a right to; he bought her for two oxen... There is a lean dog going after him, to whom I suppose he never gives more than a bone from which he has sucked the marrow; but his dog loves him, as his wife does... He is the most interesting and intelligent thing I can see just now, except, perhaps, Doss [a dog]. (227)

She goes on to muse, from the evolutionary perspective promoted in the last section of “Times and Seasons,” “Will his race melt away in the heat of a collision with a higher? Are the men of the future to see his bones only in museums—a vestige of one link that spanned between the dog and the white man?” (227-28). Later, as Waldo writes the story of his years away from the farm during which he went out to “see the world” and worked as a clerk in a shop, he seems almost surprised to have found that the only “respectable thing in that store... was the Kaffir storeman. His work was to load and unload, and he never needed to smile except when he liked” (252—my italics). Finally, in perhaps the most racist passage of the entire novel, while Waldo is at work planing a new table for Em, he pauses to throw one of the curls of wood “down to a small naked nigger, who had crept from its mother... From time to time the little animal lifted its fat hand as it
expected a fresh shower of curls; till Doss . . . would catch the curl in his mouth and roll
the little Kaffir over in the sawdust, much to that *small animal’s* contentment” (292–my
italics; note how the actual animal, Doss, is called by name, while the Kaffir child is
spoken of simply as an animal). In all these examples, the dichotomies of the Genesis
narrative remain untransformed: the man versus animal opposition of the sixth day
continues to govern Schreiner’s discourse; she has merely exchanged the literal beasts of
Genesis for metaphorical ones (an exchange that is, moreover, basic to all racist
discourse).

Another dichotomy that is not eradicated, but merely reversed, is that of man
versus woman. In Genesis Two, Eve is created from Adam’s rib and is to be subservient
to Adam, a “suitable helper” (Genesis 2:20) named “woman, for she was taken out of
man” (2:23). Rather than eliminating the idea of superior/inferior manifest in this section
of Genesis, Schreiner merely reverses that hierarchical order in the character of Lyndall.
Lyndall is constantly asserting her independence from masculine domination, as she tells
Em when the latter asks her if she is engaged: “I am not in so great a hurry to put my
neck beneath any man’s foot; and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies . . .
There are other women glad of such work” (184). She derides the attentions she receives
from men when she tells Waldo, “You are our goods, our merchandise, our material for
operating on; we buy you, we sell you, we keep six of you crawling to our little feet . . .
We keep six of you dancing in the palm of one little hand . . . then we throw you away,
and you sink to the Devil” (192). Lyndall’s refusal to marry the handsome stranger
whose child she carries, and her insistence upon giving birth to it alone in a hotel room in
the Transvaal, further emphasize her resistance to and reversal of the biblical male/female roles. Finally, her relationship with the foppish Gregory Rose (who, Lyndall observes, is a “true woman—one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it. How happy he would be sewing frills into his little girls’ frocks, and how pretty he would look sitting in a parlour, with a rough man making love to him!” [197]) in the chapter entitled “Gregory’s Womanhood” is the very epitome of male/female role reversal. As Lyndall, deliriously ill, but still determined never to submit to marriage, lies dying on a “crimson quilt” in a dark hotel room, Gregory Rose shaves his beard and dresses as a nurse to be near her until her death. He becomes the servant, the helper (and to him “his hands were glorified for what they had done” [273]), while Lyndall remains hardened toward her dead infant (“I did not love it; its father was not my prince; I did not care for it” [278]) and continues, even in her weakness, to act as “master” over Gregory Rose (although she believes she is paying a hired female nurse to care for her). Thus, the biblical picture of woman as man’s helper is turned on its head—another example of Schreiner’s inability to wrest herself free from the polarized dualisms perpetuated by biblical texts like the Genesis story and, by extension, the colonial culture at large.

Finally, the very dichotomy between God’s justice (requiring death) and mercy (offering eternal life) that predominated in both Part One and “Times and Seasons” continues to haunt the characters (and, by extension, the reader) in Part Two. This is especially evident in Waldo’s reaction to Gregory Rose’s recounting of the story of Lyndall’s death. After discovering that Lyndall (whom he has loved his entire life) has died, Waldo awakens from a dream in which he imagined her still alive and in love with
him and, gripped with grief, flings the door open to look at the stars (in which, said Otto in Part One, the “souls we loved lived” [55]). Longing for Lyndall to be alive somewhere, he searches the stars’ “solitary grandeur” (286)--only to “shudder, . . . at last turn[ing] away from them in horror. Such countless multitudes . . . and yet not in one of them all was she! . . . Year after year, century after century, the old changes of nature would go on . . . but in none of them would she have part!” (286-87). Waldo paces the room frantically, “pain ma[king] his soul weak; it cried for the old faith” (287). Indeed, Waldo calls out in desperate prayer, “Oh, God! God! for a Hereafter!” (287). Waldo’s longing for the “old faith”—and his (and the reader’s) knowledge that it cannot be recovered because of Waldo’s/Schreiner’s failure to reconcile the ideas of divine justice and mercy—render this passage one of the most despairing in the novel’s second half.

The “old God” of sovereign wrath also continues to make itself felt in the second half through the actions and beliefs of the matriarch Tant Sannie, who is depicted as too foolish even to raise the religious questions concerning God’s justice and mercy that torment Waldo throughout the novel. Indeed, in the final chapter it is obvious that Tant Sannnie assumes the concept of a deity who is sovereign over, and wrathful toward, human affairs to be the correct one—be it in her views on human procreation (“If a woman’s old enough to marry, and doesn’t, she’s sinning against the Lord . . . What, does she think the Lord took all that trouble in making her for nothing? It’s evident He wants babies, otherwise why does He send them?” [293]) and on nineteenth-century scientific progress:

It’s with all these new inventions that the wrath of God must fall on us. What
were the children of Israel punished for, if it wasn’t for making a golden calf? . . .

Let them make their steam-waggons and their fire-carriages; let them go on as though the dear Lord didn’t know what he was about when He gave horses and oxen legs,—the destruction of the Lord will follow them. I don’t know how such people read their Bibles. When do we hear of Moses or Noah riding in a railway?

(294)

Tant Sannie’s reflections thus ironically hearken back to the beginning of the novel (and of “Times and Seasons”), as they recall and echo Waldo’s Old Testament God of wrath. The opposition between justice versus mercy remains ironically, parodically, present at the end of a novel from which it cannot be eliminated, try as the author might to do so.

Finally, Tant Sannie’s disparaging commentary on the modern creations of the late nineteenth-century (“steam-waggons” and “fire-carriages”) is also an example of the various ways in which Schreiner disparages the act of creation in Part Two. Indeed, in the second half of the novel creation itself becomes an almost grotesque undertaking: Waldo’s carving (which it took him “nine months” to produce [158]) is described as depicting a “grotesque little mannikin at the bottom” (159), its portrayal of “men and birds . . . almost grotesque in their laboured resemblance to nature, [bearing] signs of patient thought” (157);28 and, in a speech that eerily foreshadows the death of Lyndall’s “creation,” her newborn child, Lyndall states,

I would not like to bring a soul into this world. When it sinned and when it suffered, something like a dead hand would fall on me [ironically, it is Lyndall’s hand that closes over the cold feet of her dying child (278)]—‘You did it, you, for
your own pleasure you created this thing! See your work! . . . A parent is only like to God: if his work turns out bad so much the worse for him; he dare not wash his hands of it. (209)

The repeated failure to create anew in Part Two of the novel locates us at the problematic site of the "post"—the space after the attempted "new creation," in which the old uncannily repeats itself in different contexts. As I have argued, Schreiner’s "post" Genesis narrative is ultimately not "post" anything, but remains firmly ensconced within the original binary discourse it tries to undermine; it cannot, as it were, wash its hands of creation and the stories that attach to it. But this is not to say that the work has "turned out bad" and that we should wash our hands of it. In its ambivalent inclusion of and working through of colonial discourse (via its adoption of the binary structures that are basic, for instance, to the Genesis story), as well as in its repeated if "failed" attempt to envision a post-colonial world (from which those structures would be eradicated), Story is an exemplary postcolonial text. Indeed, its very genius lies in this problematic mixture of the old worlds it repeats and the new worlds of which it dreams.
CONCLUSION: “THE MARK OF THE OLD WOUND”

He touched the dying animal light at last as it ran past him and it turned its head around towards him, a little startled by his alien fingers and hand, remembering something forgotten. The alert dreaming skin—radiant with spiritual fear and ecstasy—quivered and vibrated like the strings of a harp where the mark of the old wound was and it tossed the memory of the spear on its head, trying to recall the miracle of substance and flesh. It stood thus—with the carpenter’s hand upon it—with a curious abstract and wooden memory of its life and its death. The sense of death was a wooden dream, a dream of music in the sculptured ballet of the leaves and the seasons, the shavings on the ground from the carpenter’s saw and chisel.

Wilson Harris, Palace of the Peacock

To return, finally, to a comparison of Schreiner’s Story and Harris’s Palace of the Peacock, one cannot help but note the disparity in the moods of their respective endings. Why, when both authors reinscribe the Genesis story, “miscegenating” or “creolizing” their texts in order to rewrite the central biblical text of Empire, does one tale end in religious despair and, ultimately, nihilism (even Schreiner’s concept of the “Universal Unity,” in which the souls of the departed supposedly partake, is characterized at the end
of the novel as a “dream and phantom” [290-91]), the other in a vision of rebirth and regeneration, an almost religious hope? For, indeed, *Story* ends in Waldo’s solitary death, after he learns he will never “possess” Lyndall as his own, with only a few disinterested chickens looking on; *Palace* ends in the symbolic rebirth of the already twice dead crew members, each of them holding “at last in his arms what he had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed” (*Palace* 117). Is this difference in mood and outcome merely a function of their differing historical moments? That is to say, was Harris’s ability to re-vision the colonial experience, its discourse and its narratives, in a more positive way due only to the fact that he lived and wrote at a time of decolonization? That he lived and wrote at a time when the deconstruction of binary oppositions was becoming more conceivable (as the ascension of postmodern/poststructuralist thinking would suggest)?

While both these arguments are salient, I would like to nuance them by suggesting, in conclusion, that Harris “succeeds” where Schreiner “fails” because, in *Palace*, he pursues a vision of the biblical account of Christ’s death on the cross as effecting a reconciliation between God’s justice and mercy, thereby coming to terms with the very dichotomy, as I have argued, that stymied Schreiner’s attempt to “write out of” the binary colonial discourse of her day. A brief look at two remarkably similar chapters in both novels—“Waldo’s Stranger” in Schreiner’s *Story*, and the final section of *Palace*, “Paling of Ancestors”—will elucidate what I will argue is the central cause of the novels’ widely divergent endings: namely, their contrasting readings of the Bible itself.

The chapter entitled “Waldo’s Stranger” immediately follows the “Times and
"Seasons" chapter, and opens at the same moment as does "Times and Seasons": "Waldo lay on his stomach on the red sand" (137; 155). Indeed, the seven stages of "Times and Seasons" have been an interruption of the sequential narrative initiated in Part One, which is now taken up again in "Waldo's Stranger." The chapter, like "Times and Seasons," is also allegorical (and is more obviously so, one might add). However, in contrast to the previous allegory, which "failed" to mimic its biblical model, the so-called "Allegory of the Hunter" in "Waldo's Stranger" does not attempt to mimic another text at all, but is a self-consciously original allegory in its own right. Moreover, theologically speaking, it begins where "Times and Seasons" ended—that is, at the place where God has been replaced by Nature, the Bible by Science. The allegory is related by a stranger who stops to rest at the farm, and who (in contrast to St. Paul's vision of charity as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13:7) "believes nothing, hopes nothing, fears nothing, feels nothing" (159)—an indication of the direction his allegory will take. As he examines Waldo's carving, his "wooden post," the stranger allegorizes the meaning of the "grotesque figures" carved thereupon as the story of a hunter who one day catches a glimpse of a "vast white bird . . . sailing in the everlasting blue" (160); Wisdom later tells the Hunter that what he has seen is the White Bird of Truth (160). The Hunter becomes obsessed with capturing her, and spends his life hoping to possess what Wisdom tells him he will "never see, never hold . . . Nothing but Truth can hold Truth" (162). As he travels, the Hunter must abandon comforting beliefs (i.e., the birds, "fed on the grains of credulity," that cry "a human-God!" "Immortality!" and "Reward after Death!" [161]), wander alone into the land of Absolute Negation and Denial (where the "merry wisp lights" of
Sensuality tempt him), resist the lures of the lands of Superstition and Despair, and, finally, encounter the “mighty mountains of Dry-facts and Realities” (166).

It is upon these mountains that the Hunter begins to scale a “mighty wall of rock, smooth and without break, stretching as far as the eye could see” (166). The Hunter grows old and weary as he spends the rest of his life hewing stairs and carving footholds in the rock; until he can work no more and lies down to die with the “comfort” that by the steps he has carved other men will ascend: “by the stairs I have cut they will climb . . . At the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll they will curse me. But they will mount, and on my work” (168). It is only now, with the “mist of death in his eyes,” that the Bird of Truth flies overhead, dropping a single feather onto the dying Hunter’s breast (168). After a lifetime pursuit of Truth, the Hunter learns that She is actually unknowable to the individual. The only “knowledge” he can hold onto is that others (who will “never know the name” of the one who went before [168]) will use his work to come closer to capturing Truth, and that, as Wisdom had earlier counseled, when “enough of those silver feathers shall have been gathered by the hands of men, and . . . woven into a cord, and the cord into a net, that in that net Truth may be captured” (162). Moreover, it is only the scientist—the one who actually resists the lures of religion and sensuality to begin tackling stern reality—who can contribute to the formation of this net (though the suggestion seems to be that the quest to form this net will be interminable, as the mountains at last visible at the apex of the Hunter’s climb/lifetime rise “eternal[ly]” into the clouds [168]).

In essence, then, the allegory of the Hunter and the Genesis allegory in “Times
and Seasons" can be read as counterparts: "Times and Seasons" writes through the biblical text to arrive at a complete rejection of the Bible and its dichotomies in favor of Science; the allegory of the Hunter solidifies this rejection and goes further to expose even Science as next to futile in revealing ultimate "Truth" (reinforced by the Stranger’s musing, as he watches Waldo’s passionate reaction to both the allegory and the book by Herbert Spencer that he gives to Waldo: "Poor devil! . . . He smiled, and then sighed wearily, very wearily" [173]). The chapter ends with a sentence that recalls the images of sunshine in stage four of "Times and Seasons (which for the child inspired thoughts of hell and damnation): "There was a rare beauty to him in the sunshine that evening” (173). On first reading this chapter-ending seems to offer a moment of unadulterated optimism, but upon finishing the novel one realizes that it is actually steeped in irony, because it foreshadows Waldo’s death “in the yellow sunshine,” on a “sunshiny afternoon,” in the midst of a “sunshiny dream” (300). Waldo’s sense of the “rare beauty” in the sunshine, like Schreiner’s sense of the “throb of Universal Life” underlying all things (290), is thus at the end of the novel exposed as a “dream and phantom” (291); indeed, the only “reality” left at the end of Story is the very failure of stories, whether those of the Bible or of Science, to counter the nihilism of existence.

While both the allegory of the Hunter and Story as a whole end upon a nihilistic note, Harris’s “Paling of Ancestors”—a similar recounting of one man’s pursuit of truth up the face of a cliff in which he must hew his own footholds—begins at this nihilistic juncture, and moves, unlike Schreiner’s narrative, from despair to religious hope. After five days pursuing the runaway “folk” upriver, Donne (along with Jennings and daSilva,
the only two of his river crew left alive) has reached the “wall and cliff of heaven,” which he must scale in order to discover (and re-cover) the beginning, the “indestructible nucleus and redemption of creation” (Palace 101). As mentioned above, the journey is, up until this point, a reverse parallel movement through the seven days of creation as outlined in Genesis One. However, as Donne reaches this fifth day, he, like Schreiner’s soul in stage five, recognizes the need for a departure. He has lost most of his crew, the “old Arawak woman” (their guide) has disappeared (99), and, in a moment of self-reflection, he recognizes the “horror and hell” (101) of his harsh rule of the Guyanese aboriginals:

And a wave of hopelessness enveloped him: everyone in the vessel was crumbling into a door into the sun through which one perceived nothing standing— the mirror of absolute nothingness. An abstraction grew around him—nothing else— the ruling abstraction of himself which he saw reflected nowhere. He was a ruler of men and a ruler of nothing. (99)

Donne here admits that he cannot return home to his former life as master over slaves; that to “return to a ruling function of nothingness and to a false sense of home was the meaning of hell” (99). As he gazes up the “steep spirit of the cliff” that he knows he must climb, Donne acknowledges the need for a new beginning; he longs for the universal truth, the “atom, the very nail of moment in the universe” (101).

Harris’s use of the word “nail” to characterize the supreme “moment” of meaning and truth points toward what will clearly become, for Donne, the “abstract image and correspondence, in which all things and events gained their substance and universal
meaning” (101): the nailing of Christ upon the cross. Even the above phrase, which encapsulates Donne’s desire to find absolute meaning, rings with the cadence of Acts 17:28, where St. Paul speaks to the men of Athens and states, “For in [Christ] we live, and move, and have our being.” The desire to return to the beginning of creation and thereby to locate the “abstract image” in which “all things [gain] their substance and universal meaning” also hearkens to St. Paul’s letter to the Colossians, where he argues that Christ himself was “before” creation:

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth . . . all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Col. 1:15-17)

The above passage of scripture goes on to describe God’s reconciliation of his fallen creation to himself, which Paul saw as effected through Christ’s death on the cross: “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Col. 1:19-20).

What becomes more and more evident as Donne progresses up the cliff is the image of Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross, and the synthesis of God’s justice and mercy that death accomplished (see, among others, Romans 3:25, where Christ’s death is described as the “propitiation” for the sin of humankind—that is, God’s mercy given because his justice is satisfied; Col. 2:14, where Paul notes that the “handwriting of ordinances that was against us” [i.e., the old law] was “[taken] out of the way, nail[ed] to the cross; and Eph. 2:15-16, where Paul, writing to the Gentiles in Ephesus, describes the
synthesis of Old and New, Jew and Gentile, effected in the cross ["having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in the ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross"]). Donne’s climb becomes a visionary sequence, in which he sees various figures in the side of the cliff (almost as if he is looking through a window). The first figure he sees is a “young carpenter,” the “craftsman of God,” who is hewing out of the “cedar of Lebanon” a rectangular face with hair that “parted itself in the middle and fell on both sides of his face into a harvest . . . Every movement and glance and expression was . . . the divine alienation and translation of flesh and blood into everything and anything on earth” (102). The allusions to Christ, while not in any way exactly parallel to biblical narrative (as is fitting, given the “creolized” nature of Harris’s text), are obvious: the Jesus of the Bible was a carpenter (Mark 6:3); traditional exegesis holds that Christ himself was the “cedar of Lebanon” spoken of in the Old Testament (Psalm 92:12); the “translation of flesh and blood” into “everything and anything on earth” is almost a reverse incarnation (in which, according to scripture, spirit became flesh and blood); or the “translation” could be read as what Christ accomplished on the cross, i.e. the “translation” of his flesh and blood into an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humankind. These references, coupled with the recurring image of a swallow (traditionally, a symbol of the Resurrection) that flits “in and out of the room” and is reflected in the “dark eyes” of the carpenter (102), suggest the biblical Christ figure.

The rest of the narrative continues to solidify this reading, as Donne, knowing the “chisel and the saw in the room had touched him and done something . . . to make him
anew” (102), begins to hammer on the wall of the cliff to attract the carpenter’s attention. The carpenter turns his gaze upon Donne, who then sees the “image of Death in the carpenter” (103) and, immediately after this vision, sees a horned animal “bounding towards him through the prehistoric hole in the cliff . . . It had a wound in its side from a spear” (103). Again, these images allude to Christ’s death on the cross, where according to scripture “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side” (Jn. 19:34). Moreover, in the Old Testament, horned animals—specifically “bulls”—were to be used as sin offerings for the Israelites (see Lev. 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22); in the New Testament, according to Hebrews 10:1-18, Christ takes the place of horned animals such as bulls and goats as a perfect and final “sin offering” for all of humankind—an apt example of the synthesis (“creolization”) of Old Testament justice (requiring constant atonement for sin via animal sacrifice, the animals “standing in the place of” the people) and New Testament mercy (Christ’s death finished the “work” of animal sacrifice, as both a person [not an animal] standing in the place of other people, and, according to scripture, as a perfect representative of persons standing in the place of other persons [Eph. 2:14ff]). Finally, as the horned animal dies, the room becomes illuminated with the “richest impressions of eternity,” perhaps signaling the fact that, according to scripture, Christ’s death made “eternal life” available to all humankind (cf. Mk. 10:30; Mt. 25:46; Jn. 3:16, 10:28, 17:2; Rom. 6:23; 1 Tim. 6:12; et. al.).

It is also at this point that another “death” occurs when Jennings “slipp[ed] suddenly in the dark upon a step in the cliff” (105). Now, as the narrator tells us, only Donne and daSilva are left to wonder “whose turn would be next to fall from the sky as
the last ghost of the crew had died and they alone were left to frame Christ’s tree and home” (106), yet another reference to the cross. As they continue climbing upward, Donne and daSilva “c[o]me upon another window in the wall” (106), this one containing a different image of the biblical Christ—the infant Jesus and the Madonna (note the reversal of biblical narrative order: i.e., Christ’s death is depicted before his birth). Donne, filled with longing and feeling a “glowing intimacy,” looks into the room and sees that it is “Bare, unfurnished, save for a crib in a stall that might have been an animal’s trough” (106), alluding to the manger into which Mary placed the infant Christ (Lk. 2:7;12;16). He also sees a woman with a “child [who] also stood at her feet” (Palace 106), images which are “drawn with such slenderness and everlasting impulse one knew it was richer than all the images of seduction combined to the treasuries of the east” (107). The very epigraph to “Paling of Ancestors,” an excerpt from Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem “The Starlight Night,” foreshadows the image of the Christ and Madonna Donne encounters: “This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse / Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.” Indeed, it seems here that Donne himself is gazing through the “piece-bright paling” upon the image of “Christ and his mother.”

As Donne watches mother and child, he suddenly loses the physical sense of sight, becoming “truly blind at last,” as he also recognizes his own worthlessness, noting “. . . the unflinching clarity with which he looked into himself and saw that all his life he had loved no one but himself . . . It was his blindness that made him see his own nothingness” (108). This is yet another (ironically inverted) reference to scripture, in which “blindness” is equated with spiritual unbelief, “sight” with spiritual understanding (Mt.
23:16ff, where Jesus continually calls the unbelieving Pharisees “blind;” see also Jn. 9:40; 2 Cor. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:9). Here, Donne’s apex of spiritual understanding (“as one looking into the void of oneself upon the far greater love . . . that has made the universe” [107]) occurs simultaneously with the realization of his blindness.

It is Donne’s physical blindness that finally leads to his death as well, as he and daSilva can no longer climb and reach the point of exhaustion and fall from the cliff on “the dawn of the sixth day of creation” (108; again, note the inversion of biblical narrative; humans are created on the sixth day in Genesis; here, Donne and daSilva die, but are symbolically re-created on the seventh day, as discussed below). In death they reach the ultimate destination for which the novella is named: the “Palace of the Peacock,” which manifests itself as the image of the longed-for “atom,” the “nail of the moment in the universe.” Here the Palace, the culmination of Donne’s symbolic journey and quest for truth, is pictured as merging the Old Testament tree that brought death and damnation (the Tree of Knowledge) with the New Testament tree that brought life and salvation (the cross of Christ):

I saw the tree in the distance wave its arms and walk when I looked at it through the spiritual eye of my soul . . . The bark and wood turned to lightning flesh and the sun which had been suspended from its head rippled and broke into stars that stood where the shattered leaves had been . . . The stars became peacock’s eyes, and the great tree of flesh and blood swirled into another stream that sparkled with divine feathers where the neck and the hands and the feet had been nailed. (112)

Perhaps this vision is what has allowed Harris to assert that, even in the face of
postmodernist scepticism, “one can have a religious hope,” as his reading of the cross as effecting reconciliation between Old and New, justice and mercy, seems to point toward a more “creolized” understanding of the Bible as a whole than did Schreiner’s—an understanding that allows him to overcome the “sense of death” with which Schreiner’s novel concludes, to re-vision this death as a “wooden dream.” At the end of Harris’s novel, this dream of death makes way for the beginning of a new life of “fulfilment and understanding”—the new life that ushers forth, startlingly, paradoxically, from “the mark of the old wound” (104).

* * *

As I have attempted to show in this conclusion, the construction of Harris’s “palace,” and of his Palace as a whole, is deeply indebted to a religious vision that understands and takes into account the synthesizing work of the cross. While more than plausible, this conclusion itself needs to be supplemented by one last, cautionary note: when positing any interpretation of Harris’s work, we must always take care to keep in mind that according any “one” meaning to Harris’s texts flies in the face of his fictional project, and for this reason the undeniable presence of Christological symbolism at the end of the novel should be read as only one hermeneutic key among many, opening the door to only one of many possible interpretations of Palace. As I noted in Part One of this thesis, Harris’s aesthetic program is a field of experiment in which nothing is ever finished; it is a “beginning” that is constantly in a state of revision (an “unfinished
Genesis," to use Harris's own term for it). Indeed, Harris’s work so vehemently resists singular interpretation that one might just as easily construct an argument that Palace recounts a journey through the *illusions* of conventional religious faith into a new spiritual vision that both eradicates and includes those former "illusions" (for the "many rooms of the palace where [Donne and the crew] stood" [recalling John 14:2, "In my Father’s house are many mansions"] are "free from the chains of illusion we had made without" [Palace 116]). Perhaps it is, finally, the very fact of this resistance to singular interpretation that allows Harris to image truth as a brilliantly plumed tail of feathers, so much more diverse and substantial than the solitary feather that drops onto the chest of the exhausted hunter from the elusive "vast white bird of truth" that Schreiner’s Waldo spends his life hunting after: "It was a feather. He died holding it" (Story 169).
NOTES

1. Arif Dirlik, Anne McClintock, and Stuart Hall have all noted the "academic marketability" (McClintock, quoted in Hall 243) of the term "post-colonial" in American academia today. Dirlik says the post-colonial is "a post-structuralist, post-foundationalist discourse, deployed mainly by displaced Third World intellectuals making good in prestige Ivy League American Universities and deploying the fashionable language of the linguistic and cultural 'turn' to 'rephrase' Marxism, returning it 'to another First World language with universalistic epistemological pretensions'" (quoted in Hall 243).

2. There is currently no published critical study that has read the "Times and Seasons" chapter in Story as an allegory of the seven days of creation in Genesis One. The present study aims not only to argue for this reading, but to posit, further, that the allegory's very "failure" (its parodicity, to use a term I introduce later) helps situate the novel squarely within the body of postcolonial literature.

3. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

4. Berkman notes that Schreiner "may have taken this image from Darwin's Origin of Species, where the tree of life . . . appears in an extended metaphor" (Berkman 268). However, she fails to mention the biblical source in Genesis 3:22: "And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.'"

5. Schreiner's religious upbringing was anything but homogeneous. Rather, the particular brand of Christianity she rejected was actually a mixture of several conflicting religious sects. On the one hand, her mother's family were originally Wesleyan Methodists, but eventually followed George Whitefield (evangelist of the first Great Awakening) in his acceptance of the Calvinist doctrine of the predestination of the elect. Her mother Rebecca was strict, puritanical, and "considered childhood submission to adults and older siblings the moral correlative to human submission to God, female to
male, and blacks to whites" (Avrech-Berkman 16). Her mother also, according to Schreiner, frequently exploited religious terror in her methods of child rearing (17). Her father, Gottlob Schreiner, on the other hand, was a Wesleyan (Methodist), and therefore Arminian in his thinking (everyone has a chance for salvation, not just the elect; moreover, humans play a part in their own salvation in that they have the "free will" to either accept or reject God's grace). According to Schreiner, he was "infinitely tenderer to us as children and had a much greater heart than my mother" (quoted in First and Scott 47). Her parents' divergent theologies, and consequent attitudes and actions toward others, thus typified the justice/mercy dichotomy with which Schreiner wrestled, and more than likely abetted her eventual disillusionment with and rejection of the Christian faith.

6. Cf. Augustine, On Genesis Against the Manicheans (De Genesi contra Manichaeos), Books 1-5, in which Augustine reads Genesis One allegorically as both a history of humankind from Adam to the end of the world and as an allegory of a single human life from birth to death; "Caedmon's Hymn," the earliest extant poem in English; Milton's Paradise Lost; and Jacques' speech on the Ages of Man in Shakespeare's As You Like It.

7. Homi Bhabha has pointed out that reading colonial texts as uniformly socially/historically mimetic merely "foster[s] their reabsorption into an English tradition, domesticating their radicalism by ignoring the important colonial disruptions to the 'English' surface of the text" (Ashcroft 34; see Bhabha, "Representation"). The present study focuses on one such "disruption:" that is, "undomesticated" postcolonial parodies of the Genesis creation account.

8. Earlier critics have almost without exception dismissed Story as haphazard and lacking in structural unity. Elaine Showalter asserts that Schreiner had "no idea how to construct a novel" (Showalter, Review 106) and that "the labors of construction and plotting were beyond her" (Literature 198); Vineta Colby finds "glaring flaws" in Story (Colby 62); Richard Rive flatly states that "the loose manner in which [Schreiner] puts down her thoughts, regardless of the principal theme of the book, often detracts from the aesthetic value of her novels" (Rive 240); and Uys Krige describes certain allegorical passages in Story as "sticking out from the rest of the book like the exposed scaffolding of an uncompleted building" (Krige 7). Recent years, by contrast, have marked a drastic shift in how Story's idiosyncrasies are read: see Gerald Monsman, 50-51; and Rachel Blau Duplessis, 21. For the favorable opinions of other South African writers, see Doris Lessing, 97-129; Nadine Gordimer, 20-21; and Stephen Gray, 143. For a recent general introduction to her life and work, see Clayton.

9. Indeed, as the authors of The Empire Writes Back suggest, recognizing that the metropolitan center itself is only a linguistic/cultural construct can have a liberating effect for postcolonial writers. When the powerless move beyond the assumption that "words
are the signifiers of a pre-given reality, a reality and a truth which is only located at the
centre" (Ashcroft 89), and recognize the extent to which the imperial center is a purely
linguistic/cultural construct, the center of order becomes "the ultimate disorder. This
perception is both the ultimate rebellion and the ultimate unveiling performed by post-
colonial literature. There is no centre of reality just as there is no pre-given unmediated
reality. If language constructs the world then the margins are the centre and may
reconstruct it according to a different pattern of conventions, expectations, and
experiences" (90-91).

10. Superimpositions of this sort are at the heart of what critics have identified as the
essentially allegorical nature of colonial discourse--its inability to start anew, its
insistence (from Columbus's first acts of naming onward) on "read[ing] the territory of
the other by reference to an anterior set of signs already situated in a cultural thematics,"
thereby making the "new world . . . contingent upon the old" (Slemon 161).

11. Hutcheon notes that the OED definition of parody as a "ridiculing imitation" derives
from the etymological assumption that the only correct translation of the Greek "parodia"
is "counter-song." She goes on to argue that the root "para" can also be translated
"beside," therefore suggesting an "accord or intimacy rather than a contrast" (32).

12. See notes 17 and 18 on E. K. Brathwaite, below, for a discussion of this
simultaneous movement into both past and future in Caribbean literature.

13. For a detailed account of Schreiner's representations of blacks, see Raiskin, 79-94.

14. The phrase "the second death" alludes to Revelation 20:14: "Then death and Hades
were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death." Ironically, Harris
evokes this biblical image of the end of all things to title the chapter that initiates a
journey in which Donne and his river crew will, in effect, reach the "beginning" of all
things as their journey culminates at the Palace of the Peacock, where the narrator sees the
faces of all the crew members who died during the journey. The biblical "second death,"
then, in Harris's fiction, is re-visioned as a second life--another example of postcolonial
appropriation of the Judeo-Christian traditions imported by the British Empire.

15. See Sandra Drake 67; Michael Gilkes, Wilson Harris 24; Hena Maes-Jelinek, Naked
Design 56. Barbara Webb is the only critic who has explicitly stated that the seven-day
journey in Palace is "a paradoxical reversal of the seven days of creation" (77); however,
she fails to support this contention with any kind of textual reference or demonstration.
Jean-Pierre Durix convincingly argues that the seven-day period of "stripping" in The
Secret Ladder is a "genesis in reverse" (34), but does not extend his argument to Palace. Hena Maes-Jelinek's The Naked Design shows how Palace is an "architectural, dynamic revision and reconstitution of the past" (19) and argues that "creation involves destruction, the breaking down of what would otherwise be a rigid construction" (43), but never traces this "breaking down" through the seven-day biblical account. Certainly a developed reading of Donne's river journey as (re)mapping the biblical Genesis in reverse is highly overdue.

16. Of course, in offering this particular reading I am aware that it is (and should be) only one of a myriad number of possible interpretations. To argue for any "final" reading of Harris's work would be to contradict the aesthetic grounds upon which he builds (and upon which I have built my argument in this essay), as it would relegate the critic to the realm of Manichean dualisms and hierarchical structure from which Harris's fiction strives to break free. His method of accomplishing this through the marriage of contraries ("creolization") is discussed below. For a related, but decidedly more straightforward, Latin American "reversal" of the Genesis narrative, see Alejo Carpentier's The Lost Steps (1953).

17. In removing the final "e" from "name" to coin a term that designates an "original" identity, Brathwaite acknowledges that one's journey into the past cannot reveal an authentic identity, but only a "reduction of the original, its translation into something other than what it once was" (Bongie 57)—that is, one's original "name" transformed by the effects of creolization. In this sense the journey backward (toward one's "name") will inevitably and simultaneously be a movement forward (as one's modern vantage point reveals that "name" has become "nam," thus pointing to a present and future "creolized" identity). One's "nam," then, is paradoxically both aboriginal and unoriginal.

18. Brathwaite travels into the past to recover an ancestral "nam," and aboriginal essence, which he sees as authentic; Harris travels backward toward a "nam(e)less and therefore (in Harris's terms) more authentic dimension of being" (Maes-Jelinek, Naked Design 10). Furthermore, Brathwaite claims time and space must be hierarchically reversed in a post-colonial context; Harris claims that "space 'annihilates' time as it establishes itself as the primary category, the 'womb' of space from which and to which temporal structures and constructions arise and return" (Griffiths, "Post-Colonial Space and Time," 67). Griffiths argues in favor of a "more integrative account of post-colonial critical positions in the Caribbean which will acknowledge both the powerful differences and the great similarities of the two main streams of critical thought that I have represented by the work of Brathwaite and Harris" (69). My own analysis supports this integrative account by emphasizing their shared recognition of creolization as the potential catalyst of "new world order."
19. William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." Harris said in a 1979 interview that he has "always greatly and spontaneously admired from my youth English poetry such as the works by [among others] Blake" (quoted in Fabre 47). For comparisons of Harris with Blake, see Louis James 39; and Michael Gilkes, Wilson Harris 3.

20. Harris has called himself a "kind of Christian Gnostic . . . Not Gnostic in the extreme sense in which the Cathars were Gnostics. They said that the Creation was the work of a demiurge. I can't accept that" (quoted in Riach 56).

21. See Hena Maes-Jelinek, "Myth"; Sandra Drake, chapter one; and Antonio Benitez-Rojo, chapter five. The myth of El Dorado itself has become a spiritual trope; as Harris notes in "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," the El Dorado myth "has begun to acquire a residual pattern of illuminating correspondences. El Dorado, City of Gold, City of God" (Harris, Tradition 35).

22. Waldo has, even here, conflated the two New Testament recordings of Christ’s "mustard seed" teachings on faith; in Luke 17:6, Christ is recorded as saying "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." The error could have been unintentional; or it could have been intentional, pointing forward to Waldo’s "mockingly strange, trivial questions" about the veracity of the Bible and the disparities in the synoptic gospels: "Why did the women in Mark see only one angel and the women in Luke two? Could a story be told in opposite ways and both ways be true? Could it?" (Story 67).

23. Although it is doubtful that Schreiner would have read Augustine’s On Genesis Against the Manicheans at the time she wrote Story (in her early 20's), it is interesting to note that Augustine, too, equates Day One of creation with the period of infancy, and Day Two with childhood (although Schreiner’s childhood occupies both stage two and three in her narrative).

24. According to Genesis 1:2, water existed before the creation of the universe: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

25. Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known." (Jeremy Taylor, by the way, was a seventeenth-century clergyman whose writings greatly influenced John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.)
26. Augustine offers a fascinating interpretation of how the seventh day encompasses the former six. He argues that God created only one day, which recurred seven times: "... it is not clear when God created the seventh day, which is called the Sabbath. For on that day He made nothing; indeed, on that seventh day He rested from what He had made on the six days. How, then, did He rest on a day He did not create? ... Perhaps we should say that God created only one day, so that by its recurrence many periods called days would pass by. It was not necessary, then, for Him to create the seventh day, for the seventh recurrence of the day God had created made it [i.e., the "seventh day" in Genesis 2]" (Augustine, On Genesis Against the Manicheans, Book Four, Chapter 20).

27. In reading the creation of Adam and Eve concomitantly with the Genesis One narrative, I am following the exegetical tradition that reads the two narratives together: that is, that reads Genesis 2:7-25 as simply a more detailed account of what is going on in Genesis 1:27.

28. Waldo's "grotesque" attempt to create something new (a carving) out of something old (the figures of the men and birds he sees everywhere around him) can be read as yet another mise-en-abîme of Schreiner's "failed" allegory in "Times and Seasons."

29. Schreiner considered the "Allegory of the Hunter" to be her finest work, and later excerpted it for publication on its own as simply "The Hunter" (Avrech-Berkman 50). So moved by the allegory was the influential nineteenth-century philosopher Herbert Spencer that he requested it be read to him on his deathbed (51).
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