The Morning Sun is Shining - Olive Schreiner
Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was born at a mission station called Wittebergen near Herschel in the Eastern Cape.

She is best known for her critically acclaimed novel *The Story of an African Farm*, initially published under the pseudonym Ralph Iron because of a contemporary prejudice against women authors. After achieving recognition as a writer, Schreiner wrote extensively on a range of political and social issues as an opponent of racism and an early feminist.
About the Poet: Olive Schreiner

- Her book Women and Labour, written in 1911, was considered the bible of the women’s emancipation movement in England and America. She was also a pacifist and did not agree with British imperialism in South Africa or with the South African (Anglo-Boer) War that was fought to achieve it.

- This poem conveys a strong sense of place and the natural environment, as often found in Schreiner’s works.
The speaker praises the beauty of Nature around her. She describes various aspects and uses many auditory ‘images’ to engage the reader. The last four lines step away from the natural scene. The sadness in these lines (to do with loss) are surprising, given the tone and content of the preceding lines.

Happiness is real when shared”. The poet comments on the beauty of a morning in which the sun is shining. She highlights the various elements that make the morning so beautiful, but then she changes track/direction and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone. A nature poem that shows the beauty of nature, but highlights her loneliness as she has no one with whom to share it.
Summary of the poem

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Olive Schreiner’s only child, a daughter, died within a day of being born. The juxtaposition between the beauty and abundance of Nature, and the immense loss suffered by the speaker, is poignant and incredibly sad.
Structure

A 16-line poem made up of 4 distinct parts. In line 1-4 she discusses the sense of sight, 5-8 hearing and 9-12 smell. All these senses enjoy the morning with the sun shining. There is a regular rhyme scheme and rhythm throughout lines 1-12. The last four lines deviate from this pattern. This ‘break’ in pattern increases the impact of the unexpected contents of the last four lines.

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The Morning Sun is Shining

1. The morning sun is shining on
2. The green, green willow tree,
3. And sends a golden sunbeam
4. To dance upon my knee.
5. The fountain bubbles merrily,
6. The yellow locusts spring,
7. Of life and light and sunshine
8. The happy brown birds sing.
The Morning Sun is Shining

9. The earth is clothed with beauty,

10. The air is filled with song,

11. The yellow thorn trees load the wind

12. With odours sweet and strong,

13. There is a hand I never touch

14. And a face I never see;

15. Now what is sunshine, what is song,

16. Now what is light to me?
Title: The Morning Sun is Shining

The title introduces a positive image - we associate a bright, sunny morning with warmth and happiness. However, there is a figurative irony: Her sun (child) is no longer shining (has died).

The title and the first 12 lines of ‘The Morning Sun is Shining’ invite the reader to see the beauty of Olive Schreiner’s Karoo, blessed with green willow trees, golden sunshine, bubbling fountains, springing locusts, birdsong and the scent of the thorn trees’ yellow flowers.
The Morning Sun is Shining:
Title

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We realise in line 13, however, that the speaker is mourning someone’s death: ‘There is a hand I never touch/And a face I never see’. Because of this, she writes, ‘Now what is sunshine, what is song, /Now what is light to me’. What begins as a lyrical celebration of nature ends up as a lament for the loss of a loved one.
Stanza 1: Lines 1-2

Lines 1-2: The morning sun is shining on / The green, green willow tree,

- Lines 1-2 set the scene: it's a beautiful morning and the speaker reflects on the beauty of the morning.

- The repetition of 'green' reinforces the beauty of nature, emphasising the intensity of the colour of the willow tree. Green is a colour that is associated with life, synonymous to freshness, lush vegetation and health. The sun is also symbolic of life.
Stanza 1: Lines 3-4

Lines 3-4: And sends a golden sunbeam / To dance upon my knee.

- The personification of how the sun blesses the earth and provides joy and entertainment reinforces the beauty of the morning and helps create a mood of joy / enjoyment / happiness / cheerfulness.

- It is a benevolent sun “golden” that causes happiness and has connotations of riches and wealth and beauty.
Stanza 1: Lines 5-8

Lines 5-8: The fountain bubbles merrily, / The yellow locusts spring, / Of life and light and sunshine / The happy brown birds sing.

- These lines expand on the beauty of nature on a sensory level.

- The personification in line 5 gives the fountain the human quality of being joyful and reinforces the mood of happiness / cheerfulness. The personification succeeds in providing an idyllic view of the beautiful morning which emphasises the sense of well-being and happiness.

- The various hues of the colour yellow continue with the “yellow locust”, just like the “golden sun” in line 3.
Stanza 1: Lines 5-8

Lines 5-8: The fountain bubbles merrily, / The yellow locusts spring, / Of life and light and sunshine / The happy brown birds sing.

- The word ‘spring’ relate to the energy inherent in and adds vibrancy to elements of nature. This idea is amplified by the description of ‘brown birds’ in line 8. The onomatopoeic word “bubbles” is a happy sound.

- The repetition of ‘and’ (line 7) alludes to the spontaneous expression of emotions and reinforces the beauty of the speaker’s surroundings.

- The alliteration in line 7 (The repetition of the “l” sound: life and light) gives a sense of freedom and unburdened life in the happy morning.

- The singing of the bird is joyous “...happy brown bird sing...” The birds as singing about ‘life and light and sunshine’. This contributes to the idea that the natural world is celebrating life. It is as if the plants, insects and birds are all rejoicing in the morning sunshine.
Stanza 1: Lines 9-12

Lines 9-12: The earth is clothed with beauty, / The air is filled with song / The yellow thorn trees load the wind / With odours sweet and strong.

- clothed – the earth is personified wearing the beautiful clothing. Every part of the world is covered (clothed) and “filled” with a beauty that makes the poet happy.

- load the wind with odours sweet and strong – Schreiner was a South African poet, so her reference to the “thorn trees’ contextualizes the poem. The trees are also full of flowers and the sense of smell is used to show how their smell is pervasive.

- sweet and strong – the alliteration is used to reinforce the strength of the smell.

- The sibilant ‘s’ in “song”, “sweet” and “strong” contribute to the lyrical quality of the poem. This poem celebrates the beauty and sounds and smells of Nature.
Stanza 2: Lines 13-16

Lines 13-16: There is a hand I never touch / And a face I never see; / Now what is sunshine, what is song, / Now what is light to me?

- The poet’s tone/attitude changes in these lines. This quatrain reflects a stark contrast in both tone and mood in comparison to the first three quatrains.

- The word “never” indicates that there is absolutely no possibility of her being able to touch or see her child. The speaker changes to a tone of despondency / sadness /grief /dejection / hopelessness when reflecting on the loss that she has suffered.
Stanza 2: Lines 13-16

Lines 13-16: There is a hand I never touch / And a face I never see; / Now what is sunshine, what is song, / Now what is light to me?

- The speaker is filled with despair because she has lost someone important to her. ‘Touch’ suggests a very close relationship with this person. It is someone she believes she will never see again, and this thought makes her so unhappy she cannot appreciate the natural beauty around her.

- The use of the present tense implies that despite the passage of time, the speaker still grieves. This could possibly describe the extent of the speaker’s pain at the loss of a loved one.

- She ends the poem with a rhetorical question, asking what is the point of experiencing beautiful, natural morning if there is no one to share it with. The rhetorical question engages the reader to consider her situation: a beautiful day all alone, with no hope of company. She finds no solace in her beautiful surroundings.

- It implies that the beauty of the morning / the beauty of nature cannot overshadow the pain / emotional trauma the speaker experiences.
• “Happiness is real when shared”. The poet comments on the beauty of a morning in which the sun is shining. She highlights the various elements that make the morning so beautiful, but then she changes track / direction and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone.

• A nature poem that shows the beauty of nature, but highlights her loneliness as she has no one to share it with.
The tone of the first 12 lines is cheerful/happy/positive/joyful. Nature is beautiful and celebrated.

The last 4 lines changes to a tone of despair, negativity, sadness, hopeless. She is describing her sorrow and how the beautiful morning makes her sadness even greater, more poignant.
Poetic Devices

- **PERSONIFICATION** (lines 3-4): the ‘sun sends a golden sunbeam’ which ‘dances’ upon the speaker’s knee. This reinforces the beauty of the morning and helps create a mood of joy / enjoyment /happiness/ cheerfulness.

- Poetic technique: Personification: ‘merrily’ gives the fountain the human quality of being joyful and reinforces the mood of happiness / cheerfulness.

- Poetic technique: **REPETITION** of ‘and’ (line 7)- could possibly allude to the spontaneous expression of emotions and reinforces the beauty of the speaker’s surroundings.
Poetic Devices

Poetic techniques / devices: METAPHOR / IMAGE of dressing (‘the earth is clothed with beauty,’ / line 9) reflects the bounty of nature / the Divine.

ALLITERATION (‘sweet and strong’ / line 12) alludes to the intensity of the fragrance.