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Claire Martin, Outspoken Dreams : Selfhood, Sex and Spirituality in the Writings of Olive Schreiner.

A B S T R A C T

This study of the life and work of Olive Schreiner explores the tensions inherent in her political and artistic vision. It assesses the importance both of her continual movement towards a unifying spirituality and of her relentless, often fragmentary, self-exploration. Using her three novels, the allegories, her non-fictional work and her extensive personal correspondence, I examine Schreiner's sense of identity and gender and their relationship to her feminism, and her emphasis on a re-evaluation of sexual relationships within the major themes of her writing.

Throughout, I follow closely the varied and innovative directions her work takes, and critically appraise her use of dream, allegory and propaganda. With a thematic exploration of her central concerns, both personal and political, I aim to establish links between the conflict Schreiner experienced as a woman artist and current developments in feminist writing and theory, at the same time evaluating Schreiner's radical contribution to Victorian literature and the nineteenth-century women's movement.

My first chapter charts the expression of her own femaleness through the development of the personalities and lives of her fictional heroines. The second and third chapters investigate her ambivalence about gender as revealed in her relationships and her work, and the effect on her creativity of the clash between prevalent Victorian sexual stereotyping and Schreiner's own constantly changing self-image. Chapter Four deals with the growth of her spiritual awareness and its centrality to her art and politics. I finish with an examination of her attitudes towards woman's place in society, and her attempt to reconcile creative self-expression with the public voice of the committed feminist and socialist.

OUTSPOKEN DREAMS: SELFHOOD, SEX AND  
SPIRITUALITY IN THE WRITINGS OF  
OLIVE SCHREINER

by

Claire Martin

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A thesis presented for  
the degree of M. Litt.  
at the University of Durham

1986

Department of English Studies  
University of Durham



14. MAY 1987



*Olive Schreiner*

For my mother, Elsa Martin

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Esh Winning, Co. Durham.

March, 1986

Note to the Reader

In quoting from Olive Schreiner's correspondence I have reproduced her often idiosyncratic phrasing and punctuation, and include, when necessary, my own explanation or clarification.

In her published work and in writing about her there are various different spellings of Afrikaans words used. Throughout my text I have kept to the spelling of 'Karoo' and 'kopje' for these two recurrent nouns.



INTRODUCTION

1. This is to be a personal account of my experience of Olive Schreiner, the woman and the writer. As I write these words I am aware of outside pressure from somewhere prompting me to qualify this description; I feel I need to 'excuse' the personal with the reductive 'purely' or 'simply'. This sense of having to justify the use of my own thoughts, my own words, comes from years of careful conditioning in how to write in an acceptable 'literary' manner. By the time I reached University I was certain that a 'good' essay was one with an impressive chunk of references attached to the end. Having rid myself of that illusion (part laziness, some stubbornness), I eventually decided to attempt a post-graduate thesis, and was promptly given the statutory 'Notes on the presentation of theses' which are 'in addition to the Rules for the Form of Theses'. Only intended as 'general guidance', you understand, but I immediately felt I was being guided, however well-meaningly, in a direction in which I did not want to go.

I began to question my decision to write about Olive Schreiner within this structure which seemed confined and confining. I wanted to write about her because I enjoyed her writing - I found it intriguing, stimulating, surprisingly modern and relevant to much of the conflict I myself was experiencing at the time, both within personal relationships and through my involvement with the Women's Movement. My interest grew as I read more, and discovered her letters - strident, confused, pitiful, magnificent cries from the heart of a fascinating woman, at odds with herself and society.

But because this, as a student's subject, became my 'work', I found myself apologising for it.



- "So what are you studying exactly?"

- "The work of Olive Schreiner ..."

- "Oh ... who's she then?"

As I launched into explanations, I would stress that 'not much has been written about her' as if that, that need to categorise, pin down, label, was my reason for writing, not because I 'simply' wanted to express my pleasure at discovery of the woman and convey this pleasure to others. After reading any other good book 'for pleasure' I would recommend it to friends, we would discuss it eagerly, swap further editions of the same author. But with Olive Schreiner I felt furtive, guilty almost. To devote several years' work to this writer, slotting her ideas and mine into an acceptable framework of academic criticism, felt destructive rather than creative. The whole process seemed antithetical to the direction my thoughts on Schreiner were, unguided, taking.

Re-reading Doris Lessing's introduction to The Golden Notebook my doubts were reinforced. She talks of the deadening effect of having been taught "to patronise and itemise everyone for years, from Shakespeare downwards". For her a book is:

alive and potent and fructifying and able to promote thought and discussion only when its plan and shape and intention are not understood, because that moment of seeing the shape and plan and intention is also the moment when there isn't anything more to be got out of it. (1)

What I wanted was to put forward my own experience of Schreiner's work as a means of appreciating that living potency, so palpable in her writing at its best, and in doing so perhaps add something to it.

A handful of critics have tackled her 'plan and shape and intention' and come up with various interpretations of the woman and the

work: Olive Schreiner, eccentric genius (her husband Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner); Emily Bronte-like visionary (D. L. Hobman, Vera Buchanan-Gould); temperamental, mother-haunted neurotic (Marion Friedmann). These writers establish individual viewpoints, back them up with relevant biographical information and 'proof' from the texts themselves, and draw conclusions. I want to interpret, analyse, discuss, certainly, I do not intend to use Lessing's statement as an excuse for woolliness or vague rambling. I am not reacting, stubbornly, against theorising per se. (Again I am on the defensive!) I see, with Dale Spender, the need to "redefine theory and theorist ... to see theory not as something which is frequently resisted, but something we can use in our own interest": To enter the realm of theory should be "not to mystify, intimidate or oppress, but to describe and explain the experience of women in a male-dominated society which says that if such experience does exist, then it is of no account". (2)

Through a personal approach to Olive Schreiner's work I want to assert my right, as a reading, critical, theorising woman, to use such an account in an open-ended, 'fructifying' way. Creatively, questioningly.

After a couple of W.E.A.\* teaching sessions on Olive's life and writing I realised my enthusiasm was still there, in spite of all the doubts about 'using' her for academic study. Through discussion with the women who came to those classes and who responded to her ideas with similar interest and delight as well as stimulating criticism and questions, I felt convinced again of the need for a fresh appraisal of the woman and writer. While recognising and evaluating previous Schreiner study, much of which is informative and thought-provoking (I could not

\* Workers' Educational Association

hope to cover for instance, the wide-ranging areas of historical and sociological interest which Ruth First and Ann Scott's excellent biography explores (3)), I hope that this particular approach will show the extent to which Olive Schreiner enlarges our understanding of what Elizabeth Wilson has called "the Janus-face of feminism", looking "both towards the personal and towards the political". (4) In doing so, and in analysing the life and work of such an outspoken, strong-minded woman, I feel it is important that I, as Nicole Ward Jouve has done, "claim the right to say I", refusing to lurk safely behind "the anonymous array of third-person modes 'crrrrriticism', by tacit agreement, requires". (5)

2. This sect of modern man-haters is recruited from three classes mainly - those who have been cruelly treated by men, and whose faith in one half of the human race cannot survive their own sad experience; those restless and ambitious persons who are less than women, greedy of notoriety, indifferent to home life, holding home duties in disdain, with strong passions rather than warm affections, with perverted instincts in one direction and none worthy of the name in another; and those who are the born vestals of nature, whose organization fails in the sweeter sympathies of womanhood, and who are unsexed by the atrophy of their instincts as the other class are by the perversion and coarsening of theirs. By all those men are held to be enemies and oppressors; and even love is ranked as a mere matter of the senses, whereby women are first subjugated and then betrayed.

Eliza Lynn Linton, 'Modern man-haters' in The Girl of the Period, 1883 (6)

It is not what is done to us, but what is made of us ... that wrongs us. No man can be really injured but by what modifies himself. We all enter the world little plastic beings, with so much natural force, perhaps, but for the rest - blank; and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says - Work! and to us it says - Seem! To you it says - As you approximate to man's highest ideal of God, as your arm is strong and your knowledge great, and the power to labour is with you, so you shall gain all that human heart desires. To us it says - Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labour. You shall gain what men gain, but by other means. And so the world makes men and women.

Olive Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm, 1883 (7)

The Girl of the Period came out in the same year that The Story of an African Farm, with its powerful feminist heroine, Lyndall, was published. The differences between Eliza Lynn Linton's upholding of oppressive social conventions and Schreiner's direct challenge to such subtle indoctrination are startling. While I hope to show how Schreiner's work still has peculiar relevance to the challenges of feminists now and to the conflicts experienced by women, and writing women particularly, today, I do not intend this awareness of the striking modernity of her ideas to result in a separation of the woman from her world. This is to be more a psychological than a sociological study of her life and work - if I am to attach such labels to the whole at all - but it is vital that a sense of the specifically Victorian female predicament be kept to the fore in any analysis of the woman herself.

However, this is difficult to do with Schreiner as she was throughout her life essentially an alien, a woman alone and in many ways unique. The compulsive moving from place to place which characterized her restless, asthmatic adulthood began early in life when her family was forced to split up as a result of her missionary father's financial misfortunes in the Cape Colony. As a young woman she earned her living as a governess; unwelcome and confusing sexual advances from an employer and an early love affair which almost resulted in enforced marriage due to suspected pregnancy reinforced Olive's need to travel, to escape, to search for an elusive purpose and meaning in life, while asserting her independence and identity as a woman. Her whole-hearted support for oppressed peoples and minority values resulted in further isolation. In defending the Boer cause during the war, and later the rights of the blacks for equal status, she alienated herself from close friends and family. As a staunch advocate of pacifism during

the First World War she suffered long periods of loneliness and ostracism.

Although for all of her sixty-five years she was closely involved with her South African birth place - its landscape, people and politics providing the inspiration for her work - her British connections were influential in her development as a writer and campaigner for women's rights. At the same time she remained, and felt, very much an outsider in Britain - both as a woman struggling to become a professional writer, and as a South African of English and German parentage living in London.

There she found herself working against a background of political, moral and aesthetic rebellion. She discovered her own ideas, many formed in childhood, echoed in the new mould of ethical socialism, with its move away from parliamentary politics towards an interest in individualism, natural living and personal relationships. Her close friendships with Eleanor Marx, Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter rapidly raised her awareness of socialist/feminist politics, female sexuality, and a Utopian/mystical view of the world.

She became involved in the Men and Women's Club, a forum for new ideas on sex and society, and with various other progressive groups and the many other passionately idealistic individuals seeking the freedom and equality of the 'New Life' through liberal debate and radical action. It is perhaps all too easy to regard these "indefatigable founders of societies and discussion groups" as Dan Jacobson does in his occasionally insensitive introduction to the Penguin edition of The Story of an African Farm, with amused scepticism, seeing them as vague, self-obsessed eccentrics. True, many of them did undoubtedly abstain "from drawing conclusions about the actual nature of their ideals for all mankind from the manifold miseries and complexities of

their own lives". (8) But this, I would argue, was certainly not the case with Olive Schreiner. The connection between political experience and expression and a relentless self-exploration of her many 'miseries and complexities' was continually being made by this fiercely independent woman through her writing. Like Virginia Woolf after her she was acutely aware that "the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected ... the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other". (9)

3. "Can there be a free and joyful union except between free-men?" (10)

For Olive, sexual and political liberation were bound together. This is the focal point to which she constantly returns in expounding her theories on the sources of oppression and suffering in society and the key to change and progression. Sexual parasitism, prostitution, power and powerlessness - the major themes of her writing insist on a re-evaluation of sexual relationships, a working from within to without.

What she discovered in herself did not always accord with the idealism of her message; conflict was inevitable. The struggle to acknowledge and resolve the tensions between personal and political consciousness, to translate the reality of life as a Victorian woman into the creativity of work as a political writer and prophetic visionary, brought out feelings of guilt, inadequacy, insecurity and fear. These feelings are revealed and often ruthlessly explored in her writing, in letters, novels and allegories which are, not surprisingly, full of the paradoxes which animated the woman herself. Elaine Showalter has described Olive Schreiner accurately, if a little glibly, in terms of such contradictions:

A freethinker marked to the marrow of her bones with the Calvinism of her missionary parents; a disciple of Darwin, Mill and Spencer who floated in seas of sentimentality; a dedicated writer who could never finish a book; a feminist who hated being a woman; a maternal spirit who never became a mother\* ... Her womanhood, with its compelling inner space, was a haven to which she made cyclic withdrawals and from which she made sporadic efforts to escape. (11)

This characteristic movement between 'withdrawal' and 'escape' energises Schreiner's writing, at times helping and at times hindering her fight for liberation.

In these tensions inherent in Schreiner's work lies, I think, her strength as a feminist writer. As Liz Stanley has remarked in a welcome and positive assessment of her (12), her dogged insistence on a "holistic approach" to her life and work has frequently been used against her, expressed in narrow critical terms of 'success' and 'failure'. Trying her utmost to live out what she thought and wrote, she was often hurt and frequently failed to live up to her own high expectations. Yet, Stanley argues convincingly, "her 'failure' was as interesting as any more ordinary 'success' would have been". (13) In 'failing' she highlighted the internal ambiguities of the female condition, awareness of which seems a necessary and continuing part of the struggle to connect feminist analysis with practice.

4. - No, I can't write. I am having to hold myself in ...  
I wish I could write something. You know, just now my work is taking my very life's blood.
- I am weaker than you, and my weakness is of a much more terrible kind. I am very strong. I can stand quite alone, my reason and will govern all my actions: but at any time I am liable to find my emotions gathered in strength and flinging me to the ground. (14)

\* She did, in fact, 'become a mother' but tragically was not to remain one. At the age of forty she gave birth to a baby girl, a healthy 9lb 9oz, who inexplicably died sixteen hours later.



Schreiner was a woman of extremes. Her work can be irritating or exhilarating, restrained or effusive. Her demands on herself as an artist were huge; her absorption in writing had to be everything or nothing. In her search for a fictional form which would allow an exploration of female psychology combined with a defining of her moral and political stance, she evolved a powerful and protesting prose style which attempted to integrate philosophical, psychological and propagandist thought with an individual voice of passion and sensitivity. I intend to pay close attention to that style in this study - how she writes, the voice of the novelist, pamphleteer and letter-writer, and the expression of her particular combination of strength and weakness, 'reason, will and emotions'. In doing so I have chosen to approach her writing not as a critique of specific and separate 'works of art', taking each book in turn, but through an examination of the major themes which carry through all her work.

Basic to an examination of these themes will be a greater understanding of Schreiner's sense of identity and gender and their relationship to her feminism, and also her continual movement towards some kind of spiritual vision - two seemingly uncomplementary aspects of her life and work which constantly leapt out of her writing at me and which seem to have remained comparatively unexplored. Schreiner always tried to put across an exposition of political ideology linked to her own experience through her writing; she also aspired towards transcendent vision of "the unity of the Universe and our love of truth arising from that conception". (15)

In her essay 'The Leaning Tower', Virginia Woolf brings these two theories of literature into juxtaposition:

The politician says that a writer is the product of the society in which he lives, as a screw is the product of a screw machine; the artist, that a writer is a heavenly apparition that slides across the sky, grazes the earth, and vanishes. (16)

Too often, Olive Schreiner has been assessed, exaggeratedly, as either one or the other - hectoring propagandist or eccentric visionary. She can manage, frustratingly, to be neither at times, falling short of political coherence or spiritual conviction, but she can succeed, spectacularly, in being both. It proved inevitably a desperate struggle for such a unified integrity, a painful-process Michelene Wandor expresses sensitively in her poem about Olive:

..At every stage she would rebel  
against the trench ...  
  at every stage  
she would go  
over the top  
tread her instep bare against  
the sharp edge of her upturned sword. (17)

Such self-inflicted struggle to 'connect', in Forsterian terms, can perhaps be seen as the source of all Schreiner's creative energies. All her themes start here.

As a framework for my thematic exploration I begin and end, deliberately, with Woman - with Schreiner's expression of her own femaleness through her heroines, and then with an examination of her attitudes towards self and society, and the relationship of her writing to both. Throughout my study I establish links between Olive's view of herself as woman and writer and feminist novelists writing today out of the same conflict. Her heroines provide a convenient 'way in' to an understanding of her central concerns, both personal and political, in the first chapter; the final section, connecting these preoccupations to what is happening in feminist writing and theory now, will, I hope lead out of the necessarily restricted space of my own work into wider areas for thought and discussion.

CHAPTER I THE HEROINES: BROKEN AND UNTRIED POSSIBILITIES?

Rebekah is me, I don't know which is which any more. But Bertie is me, and Drummond is me, and all is me, only not Veronica and Mrs. Drummond (except a little!) Sometimes I really don't know whether I am I or one of the others. (1)

Olive Schreiner, woman and writer, is frustratingly elusive. Through her work she retreats into impassioned rhetoric, loses herself in ambivalent ideals, takes on a male persona, then a female, then both; always she speaks strongly out of a sense of personal and artistic confusion. In her novels she wrestles determinedly with the possibilities, the openings, the hope created for her staunchly independent heroines, only to let her women be ultimately thwarted and repressed. Through familiarity with her work, a recognizable pattern of struggle, escape, suffering, renunciation and compromise emerges; and this same process dominated the painful search for identity in her own life.

Like Rebekah in From Man to Man, Schreiner is good at self-deception:

Just now I do not exist; my book exists; that is all, as far as my daily life goes: Bertie sitting there that hot day in the bush, with John Ferdinand. That is why writing makes me happy because then my own miserable little life is not ... (2)

Writing, like her marriage, did not bring the longed for escape, the transcendent loss of self. From the experiences of her own 'miserable little life' came those of her heroines. Were they destined from the start to become 'broken and untried possibilities' as Schreiner saw herself? (3)

Schreiner is frequently seen as a woman alone, an eccentric genius who emerged from an isolated childhood on the barren vastness of the South African Karroo to astound the literary and political London scene with the boldness of her writing and the unremitting strength of her ideals. "Less a woman than a geographical fact", commented Rebecca West with typically acerbic concision. (4) She was unignorable, a force to be reckoned with.

Yet in the struggle of her heroines to break with convention and to live out the free, independent aspirations of the 'New Woman', we find Schreiner succumbing to another recognizable pattern - one evident in much of the female fiction of the late nineteenth century. Elaine Showalter pins it down neatly:

In retrospect, it looks as if all the feminists had but one story to tell, and exhausted themselves in its narration. They represent a turning point in the female tradition, and they turn inward. Beginning with a sense of unity and a sense of mission, a real concern for the future of womanhood, an interest in the 'precious speciality' of the female novelist, they ended ... with the dream that by withdrawing from the world they would find a higher female truth. Given the freedom to explore their experience, they rejected it, or at least tried to deny it. The private rooms that symbolize their professionalism and autonomy are fantastic sanctuaries, closely linked to their own defensive womanhood. (5)

Withdrawal from the world rather than a confrontation with its problems and challenges is the fate of both Undine and Lyndall, and, to a lesser extent, for she is able to compromise, of Rebekah. Undine and Lyndall die alone, outside, under the stars; both scenes are suffused with a vague sense of an all-encompassing spiritual truth, of individual dissolution into the vast wholeness of the universe. Whereas such an end - or rather, change of state - seems an apt and a moving one for the spiritual traveller Waldo, it does not ring true here. The reader is left dissatisfied as Schreiner, it seems, opts out of her responsibility to make decisions, offering up her heroines to sentimentality and hazy questioning: "Had she found what she sought for - something to worship? Had she ceased from being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter." (6)

The vision of woman's potential in an equal social order of the future, conjured up with unwavering vitality in Woman and Labour, Schreiner's feminist treatise, is glimpsed rarely in the novels. Ultimate release through death or dissatisfied compromise; these seem the only practical openings to any woman of the time who, like Undine, Lyndall and Rebekah, keenly felt the

hypocrisy and injustice of a patriarchal capitalist society. Perhaps, given that women writers still struggle today with the same inner and outer tensions, it is too much to ask that Schreiner's heroines should have resolved those very conflicts and come through triumphantly liberated. The power of her writing at its best comes from an acute awareness of this struggle to connect 'dream life' and 'real life'. The attempt to link the personal and political elements of experience vitalises her work, occasionally, it must be said, at the expense of artistic polish and structural cohesion.

Undine, her first, rawest and perhaps most honest novel, is worth close investigation, for that "queer little child", constant rebel and eventual martyr, is undoubtedly Schreiner herself. Later, with added professional style, uneasy objectivity and just as much passionate propaganda, Undine was developed into Lyndall and Rebekah.

1. As a child being raised by a stolid Afrikaner stepfather and a "delicate, refined" mother on an isolated farm, Undine is an alien being with "wild blood dancing in every vein", rebellious and misunderstood. Compared to her "yellow-haired, pudding-faced" stepsisters she is a tear-away, androgynous little figure, scorching her face in the sun, chasing her pet monkey Socrates (with whom she "philosophizes" naively) over the roof-tops, her "devil-ridden soul" haunted by "evil thoughts". "The world was not the place for her ... she was not fit for it", but she dreams "of the glorious time when she would be a woman and would know everything and be loved by everyone and when she would be free". (7)

Such possibility for female freedom is, from the start, subtly questioned by Schreiner. Established as the acceptable feminine norm is the passive docility of her stepsisters, the powerless fragility of her

"Mama", and the repressive righteousness of her governess, a "stiff and upright individual",

whose ideas were so truly correct, feminine and orthodox, that they might all have been placed in an ordinary breakfast saucer and left there for ever, without the least fear of their ever running over. (8)

This sense of tight restriction of both mind and body occurs again and again in Schreiner's fiction. A feeling of hysterical claustrophobia is often just under the surface of the protesting prose. Schreiner's chronic asthma, which tormented her from her mid-teens to her death, is obviously the source of the palpably physical descriptions of emotional stress. (9)

Undine's

little heart swelled so it well nigh suffocated her, but it was with a sense of freedom and strength that she was pacing up and down her little room, when she heard the key turn in the door. (10)

Lyndall, Rebekah and her sister Bertie all became prisoners too, both mentally and physically, at some stage in their lives. When Lyndall returns to the farm after her four years of education and travel she feels oppressed by the unchanging familiarity of home: "There is not room to breathe here; one suffocates." (11) Similarly, Rebekah constantly paces the small area of her private study, her 'fantastic sanctuary' (see Showalter); it is both a retreat and a cell of the mind:

'It has come upon me so vividly sometimes ... that I have almost leaped out of bed to gain air - that suffocating sense that all his life long a man or a woman might live striving to do their duty and then at the end find it all wrong' ... She had stopped in her work again and was breathing quickly. (12)

Winifred Holtby talked of the 'divided state' of the woman writer, imprisoned in the 'private nunnery of the mind', yet acutely aware of the passing moment of real life. (13) This continual fight to find some sense of unifying purpose in life while torn between the pressure to 'seem' and the longing simply to 'be', is seen by Schreiner as a peculiarly feminine predicament. (14) As children her heroines are from the beginning brutally

exposed, through their own unusual sensitivity, to the traumatic "striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing" (15) which their high expectations and demands can cause. Deviating from the conventional standards of femininity is inevitable for them, but dangerous, requiring resilience and an ability to stand alone.

The sense of wonderment and questioning which makes such deviation unavoidable is strong in the child Undine: "[She] wondered ... why anything was where it was, and why the world was the world, and the sun the sun, and she, she ..." (16) Similarly, in the Prelude to From Man to Man, a powerfully evocative picture of a significant day in Rebekah's childhood, she becomes fascinated by the flickering light of a candle in a scene which provides the sub-title for the novel:

She held up her hand and let the light shine through her fingers: the hand made a long dark shadow on the wall to the left of the room. Why was the shadow so much longer than the hand, she wondered, and why did it fall just where it did? She moved her hand and watched the shadow move. If only one were grown up, one would know all about these things! She dropped her hand on her side. Perhaps even grown-up people didn't know all. - Perhaps only God knew what lights and shadows were! (17)

Such light and shadow, both real and metaphorical, figure strongly in Schreiner's work, throwing into sharp relief key scenes of revelation and self-discovery. The empty plains of the Karroo, a true 'breathing space' for the author, lit by an unrelentingly fierce sun or cold white moon symbolise at once the harsh reality of the world faced by her heroines, "in which ... it were hard work to find the slightest trace of beauty" (18) where "all reflected the fierce sunlight, till the eye ached and blenched", (19) and also the potential for inner tranquility, a dark calmness "so far removed from all passion and strife ... so strong, so self-contained". (20)\*

\* I explore these connections, and their relationship to Schreiner's spirituality, in my fourth chapter.

Schreiner's women are formed by her African experience, just as a later novelist, Doris Lessing, was to be: "I believe that the chief gift from Africa to writers ... is the continent itself ... Africa, gives you the knowledge that man is a small creature, among other creatures, in a large landscape." (21) When Schreiner moves Undine to the parochial confines of Greenwood, home of her English relatives, the powerful evocation of scene and atmosphere evident in the first chapter, and in the novel's final section set in the crude and colourful world of the African diamond mines, is noticeably lacking. This is an imagined England (Schreiner had finished Undine before she visited Britain for the first time), a place alternately of flowery banks for lyrical picnics, or Christmas card scenes of endlessly falling snow.

Despite the artificiality of the setting however, Schreiner's portrayal of Undine's response to the women and men she meets here saves the novel from sinking into a mere set piece of Victorian melodrama. With flashes of Austen-like wit and sensitive use of revelatory dialogue the stifling hypocrisy and petty meanness of bourgeois society is remorselessly exposed. Abruptly the innocent Undine ["From my lonely African home I had brought an ignorance of evil (and of that which, holy and pure in itself, man's folly has made so)"] (22) is brought face to face with the malicious competitiveness of female relationships. Exposed to the restricted world of women like Mrs. Barnacles - "a yellow-faced, big-nosed invalid, who passed her life on a sofa and was apt to take a dyspeptic view of things" (23) - and the gleeful gossip of Miss Mell and Mrs. Goodman, Undine's illusions of potential goodness and beauty in the world are rapidly shattered: "This was a wretched earth, and perhaps, after all, there was a place of endless sin and, therefore, of endless pain; it would only be the world a little more worldly ..." (24)



The ultra-feminine Aunt Margaret, image of womanly perfection for the adoring and vulnerable Undine, turns into an insane, Mrs. Rochester-like beast in a scene of chilling Gothic horror after the death by drowning of her lover Frank, Undine's brother. From now on Undine's world is peopled by grotesque and unlikeable characters, the women appearing as malevolent, sexually-repressed gossips, abused and cast-off mistresses, or cruel and beautiful parasites. It is not surprising that Undine gives voice to Schreiner's own hunted cry which echoes throughout her letters: "I wish I was not a woman. I hate women; they are horrible and disgusting, and I wish I had never been born rather than to be one." (25)

The men of the novel are similarly repellent. Undine's puritanical grandfather, whom she takes on in a battle of wills over her non-attendance of chapel services, is brutish and domineering, "mentally as ossified and incapable of growth as any oxhide under the sun". (26); significantly, his wife is a "weak, nervous little old woman, who had had all the soul pressed out of her long ago". (27) Cousin Jonathan, Undine's unwanted and persistent suitor, is constantly referred to as the "Man with the Mouth", his personality contained for Undine in his "dreadful mouth" which holds "a horrible fascination for her". (28)

Similarly her eventual choice of lover, the virile and masterful Albert Blair, is labelled "Piece-of-Perfection", a note of objective irony which Undine struggles to maintain in vain as her masochistic relationship with him involves her in self-denigration and uneasy submission.

'How absolutely that dog obeys you, said Undine, feeling, as she always did in the presence of the Piece-of-Perfection, at a loss for an idea.

'I make most things which belong to me do that', he answered, quietly; and as she glanced up at the firm lips between the delicate golden moustache she felt it must be so.

How nice it must be to have something you must obey, something you cannot help obeying, whether you wish or not! I never have, she thought. (29)

Despising the effeminate gentleness of Albert's brother Henry, with his eyes "more soft and melting than a woman's" (30) (clearly the forerunner of Gregory Rose in African Farm), Undine is drawn by Albert's stereotypically male power. His criticisms of her "extraordinary views and manners" (31) enforce a need for self effacement:

... not one step of her sixteen years' journey had she walked in the happy mediate road .. They had told her that the day would come when she would repent having done nothing to try to conform herself, at least outwardly, to the views of others ... She would have parted with all that was highest and best in herself to become a little less Undine, a little more like anyone else... Who was this man, what was he; that he should make her grovel so? She asked herself. (32)

Undine's painful awareness that she is betraying her inner self in such emotional 'grovelling' is brought out with remarkable sincerity by Schreiner. Her own difficult relationships with men exhibit a tendency towards masochism - a deliberate crushing down of that self which was ever questioning, torn between extremes. Threatened as she felt she was by women, at times of paranoia and acute physical distress in her life, she demanded, as did Sylvia Plath, a marriage partner of equal intellectual vigour and, more importantly, of virile physicality. Undine's conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsion - her intense sympathy for 'fallen women' and yet her desire to experience the very male power which abused such women - derive undoubtedly from Schreiner's profound mistrust of her own sexuality and her gender confusion. I explore these aspects of her more fully in the following chapters.

There is a point in this first raw and patchy novel when Undine becomes for the reader a less credible character. Schreiner retreats from honest confrontation into the safer realm of feminine altruism. Undine's conflict over, with the realisation of Albert's abandonment of her, she contemplates suicide. Like Rebekah in From Man to Man, this ultimate release from self-absorbed unhappiness is rejected in favour of dutiful

service and self-sacrifice. Again this is depicted as a self-wounding process:

The evening air was cool and balmy and the smell of the cluster roses that covered the cottage was sweet, but she only dragged a bunch from its stem and crushed it in her hand till the thorns pierced it. The time had come, and come so soon, when she could serve him. (33)

By marrying Albert's wealthy widowed father, George Blair, in exchange for her own independent source of income she hopes to be able to give generously to his son. When he marries a rich heiress her sacrifice

loses all value. She is imprisoned, like Baby Bertie, by male betrayal:

In a richly furnished apartment, enveloped in a soft cloud of white lace and delicate azure ribbons, sat Undine Blair. Diamonds glittered in her hair and her little jewelled fingers strayed listlessly over the leaves of the paper before her. Around her on every side lay a profusion of those things in which a woman's soul delights - the bonbons and cakes that the Miss Mells of this world sigh for. (34)

Parasitic and powerless, she resorts to 'doing good', bestowing a "lavish generosity" on all who need material support "in an indifferent feelingless manner that made it impossible to feel thankful ... as to the rain for falling or the wind for blowing". (35) Listlessly she falls into a pattern of renunciation and compromise.

A fleeting sense of female solidarity and comradeship is hinted at in Undine's encounters with Alice Brown, Albert Blair's discarded mistress who has had a child by him, and with the downtrodden woman on board the ship to Africa who is able to confide in Undine, relating the sad details of her life as a married man's plaything. Yet Undine is as much a victim as these helpless and ostracized women, not simply of a hypocritical social order but of her own retreat from self-discovery.

Although she is able to establish some kind of independent working life for herself in the harsh, opportunist man's world of the 'New Rush' diamond fields, it is depicted by Schreiner as one of seemingly inevitable

compromise. Undine's experience of the world has resulted in an acceptance of servitude and competition. When asked what kind of work she is prepared to take on she is diplomatic:

'Anything - ironing'. She would have added 'Needlework', but a short experience had made her very wise, and she knew that a man's dog [shades of her relationship with Albert Blair] is an animal more enviable than a woman's friend if so be the one is mistress and the other maid. Needlework must be done for women, ironing might be for men, so she decided in favour of the ironing. (36)

Undine temporarily ignores her tentative friendship with 'Diogenes', a young crippled girl, to nurse a sick young English digger, to whom she gives her last shilling before he leaves Africa. "There would be nobody to care for after tomorrow. What did anything matter?" (37) The death of this selfless creature, martyred nurse and spinner of pious allegorical tales on Life and Death (see pages 311 - 328) does not move the reader. Undine burns herself out in a cathartic "breaking forth of a fiercely suppressed passion" (38) over the dead body of her former lover, Albert Blair. We cannot help wondering how Schreiner would have coped with a confrontation between Undine and Albert before his death. Alive, he posed a serious threat to her identity; dead, he is a means to her end: "There was no room for her now." (39)

The final lines of the novel regain something of Schreiner's simple pictorial strength, as Undine lies dead as on a spot-lit stage:

Her white kappie lay near her and cast a grotesque shadow, like a man's face with long nose and chin; and the light glistened on her soft brown hair. There was nothing else to be seen in the little yard. (40)

It is tempting to read into that 'grotesque shadow' a disturbing implication of ultimate male domination. As the first of Schreiner's heroines the fate of Undine sets a depressing precedent.

2.       - I am never miserable and never happy. I wish  
          I were ...
- I'm sorry you don't care for the position of women ...  
          it is the only thing about which I think much or feel  
          much - if, indeed, I have any feeling about anything. (41)

Lyndall is a curiously cold creature. Of all Schreiner's female characters she embodies the author's feminist ideals most forcefully; one chapter of the novel (IV, 3), devoted to an intense conversation she has with her soul-mate Waldo, encapsulates almost all Schreiner's thoughts on the female condition. Like the other major characters in the book she takes part in the "strange coming and going of feet" (see Preface), appearing to act and speak with peculiar detachment and composure. It is a complex and compelling novel, dreamlike in its uncertainty of time, its sudden scenes of unnerving violence, its recurring motifs and symbolic echoes, its underlying sense of a significant meaning to the ever-shifting whole.

Central as she is to the rather vague narrative drift of the novel, Lyndall, because of her part as mouthpiece rather than rounded character, can be extracted from the whole and examined with an objectivity which is more difficult to employ when dealing with either Undine or Rebekah. We become involved in their individual tragedies to an extent coolly not permitted to us by Schreiner in this case. She was protective and secretive about her first novel - her husband only discovered its existence after her death. Perhaps too much of her self had been channelled into the creation of Undine, however exaggerated and melodramatic she appears at times; in The Story of an African Farm she distributes aspects of her complex personality amongst Lyndall, Waldo and Em. Crudely, they could be labelled her politically feminist self, her spiritual, questioning self, and her female, maternal self. (We find these divisions of her personality most effectively fused in Rebekah of From Man to Man, her most sympathetic and mature creation.)

Both Waldo and Lyndall are, from the start of the novel, strangely ageless characters. They possess a wisdom and a sensitive insight noticeably lacking in the childlike old Otto, the crude and scheming Tant' Sannie, and the farcical villain, Bonaparte Blenkins. Schreiner discusses this clear sightedness of childhood with Havelock Ellis in a letter which quotes Shelley's "Genius does not invent, it perceives":

A child sees everything, looks straight at it, examines it, without any preconceived idea ... did you ever do what I was fond of doing when I was a child ... look at your hand for instance, make an effort of mind, and dissociate from it every preconceived idea. Look at it simply as an object which strikes the eye. (42)

Lyndall sees straight through the lies and playacting of Bonaparte Blenkins; she immediately perceives Waldo's internal anguish after his faith in God is crushed (see p.41). She assures herself that she will exercise this clarity of sight and purpose when she enters 'powerful' adulthood (see pp.93 and 127). Her childhood hero is Napoleon, who "had what he said he would have ... When he said a thing to himself he never forgot it. He waited, and waited, and waited, and it came at last". (43)

Again we see Schreiner's heroine vitalised by a determination to strive towards some kind of valuable idea, a freeing of the self through discovery of a higher truth. Lyndall fights uncompromisingly for what she wants; she describes to Waldo the repressive atmosphere of the school she attends:

They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are. They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate. They are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question, 'Into how little space a human soul can be crushed?' I have seen some souls so compressed that they would have fitted into a small thimble, and found room to move there - wide room. (44)

Again, as with Undine's governess and the 'ordinary breakfast saucer', we see Schreiner using a domestic metaphor to describe such oppression, an everyday object symbolic of woman's imprisonment in the home. This is

what Elaine Showalter has described as an effective attempt to "articulate the tense, indirect perceptions of a new womanhood":

her insistent and sometimes nagging narrative voice takes us to the reality of female experience. That voice, soft, heavy, continuous, is a genuine accent of womanhood, one of the chorus of secret voices speaking out of our bones, dreadful and irritating but instantly recognizable. (45)

This "fitful, fretful rhythm of a women's daily lives, a Beckett monolog without a beginning or an end", was to be used to greatest effect in Schreiner's unfinished novel From Man to Man, through her moving portrayal of Rebekah as betrayed wife and struggling mother.

Unlike Rebekah and the easily moved and maternal Em, Lyndall is harshly sceptical of a lifelong partnership with one man: "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..." (46) She makes a definite distinction between the sexes' capacity to love:

A man's love is a fire of olive-wood. It leaps higher every moment; it roars, it blazes, it shoots out red flames; it threatens to wrap you round and devour you - you who stand by like an icicle in the glow of its fierce warmth. You are self-reproached at your own chilliness and want of reciprocity. The next day, when you go to warm your hands a little, you find a few ashes. 'Tis a long love and cool against a short love and hot; men, at all events, have nothing to complain of. (47)

Yet Lyndall, like Undine, seems less than satisfied with her cynical 'coolness' and detachment. She longs wearily for a transcendent 'awakening' which she links directly to sexual passion: "I will do nothing good for myself, nothing for the world, till someone wakes me. I am asleep, swathed, shut up in self; till I have been delivered I will deliver no-one." (48) At the same time, Lyndall sees this freedom from 'self' as dangerous, blinding. Undine knew that her submission to Albert's will must involve her becoming "a little less Undine"; Lyndall realises that her autonomy cannot be submerged for long and imagines it impinging upon any relationship, even one which seems freely chosen, trusting and versatile, with

destructive results. She assures her lover, a shadowy, scarcely defined character, that the idea of marriage between them "is all madness":

You call into activity one part of my nature; there is a higher part that you know nothing of, that you never touch. If I married you, afterwards it would arise and assert itself, and I should hate you always, as I do now sometimes. (49)

These are brave statements. Schreiner exposes the paradoxes of Lyndall's feminist condition in these revelatory passages with a sincerity which is strikingly modern. Through Lyndall's spirited argument the many-tiered complexity of the individual female identity is explored in convincing depth.

In this revelation of the social and psychological pressures imposed upon women and men, the importance placed upon possessing, objectifying, 'seeming', Gregory Rose acts as a major catalyst. Lyndall describes him scornfully as a "true woman"; (50) he sees her behaviour frequently as "unwomanly". (51) He is fussily tidy, fascinated by female clothing, yet convinced that "if a man lets a woman do what he doesn't like, he's a muff". (52); she looks forward to an age of equality when woman is no longer a commodity to be bought and sold, when a woman's intellect matters more than her dimpled chin, and yet she longs to be swept off her feet by commandeering virile strength. As a bizarrely-matched pair, brought together through Lyndall's ill-health after child-bearing and Gregory's desire to serve her in any way possible, they provide a vehicle for all Schreiner's doubts and ambivalent feelings about her femininity.

D. L. Hobman's reaction to Gregory's transvestism is typical of several critics' unease:

There is an unpleasant favour about this scene, which is so improbable as to appear grotesque. The character of Rose is drawn as though the author despised him, and at the end of the novel he is virtually transformed into a woman.



What lies behind all this? Did Olive Schreiner intend to punish him by depriving him of his manhood? And if so, did she consider that womanhood was in itself a punishment? In that case she must unconsciously have despised her own sex, or at least have enviously resented the power and strength of the male. (53)

There is, as we have seen, some biographical truth in this scorn of her own sex and envy of the male. (I explore this issue further in the following two chapters.) Johannes Meintjes, a more recent biographer, takes the possible motive behind Gregory's transformation one inevitable step further, and, linking it to Schreiner's own pleasure in adopting male clothing, produces it as proof of her "latent homosexuality". (54)

To search as determinedly as D. L. Hobman does for a precise hidden meaning in this episode is undeniably tempting, as is Meintjes' tendency to elucidate the text with liberal use of twentieth century psychoanalysis. However, Meintjes seems to come nearer to Schreiner's own feelings here when he quotes the German artist, Kathe Kollwitz: "I believe that bisexuality is almost a necessary factor in artistic production." (55) Through an androgynous vision of the world Schreiner attempts to resolve the dilemma of sexual difference. This is also portrayed in the close, spiritual friendship of Lyndall and Waldo:

When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man. I only know that we are both things that think. Other men when I am with them, whether I love them or not, they are mere bodies to me; but you are a spirit; I like you. (56)

Ruth First and Ann Scott have seen the device of Gregory's disguise as a way in which Schreiner was able to "bring male and female together in a fantasy world where sex roles dissolved, and where seemingly eternal oppositions might be brought to an end". Through the final chapters of The Story of an African Farm they see created "a compelling world of possibility, an imaginative experiment which was both retreat and liberation". (57)

Lyndall ultimately turns inward, dominated not by a man - for through her determined independence she has faced and overcome that external mode of oppression - but by her own sense of personal inadequacy. She returns at the point of death to confront her own face in a mirror: "The dying eyes on the pillow looked into the dying eyes in the glass." (58) Gregory Rose, contemplating his gender-reversal, looked into the sky to ask, "Am I, am I Gregory Nazianzen Rose?" (59) Lyndall, tiring of her ever-present self, 'eating her soul to its core' (60), realised her utter aloneness when faced with her own image in a mirror. (61) Her final return to an acceptance of her individuality is Schreiner's affirmation of both her success - in breaking free from convention - and her failure - in being unable to realise this freedom in life. As First and Scott make clear, Lyndall remains "if not wholly feminist ... wholly free". (62) Schreiner's resolution to unite the personal and political elements of her heroine's life is not single-minded; Lyndall's liberation must, it seems, be a limited one.

3. "This book is going to be awfully outspoken; The Story of an African Farm was nothing to it ..." (63) From Man to Man, Schreiner's searching study of betrayal and prostitution both in and outside marriage, remained unfinished. She struggled relentlessly with it for over forty years ("Oh, I wish I could get my book done before I die. It may not be any good; but I feel I have to do it ... I've set my heart so on finishing it before the end comes") (64) but the tensions over female sexuality in the novel are never fully resolved. (65)

For the Victorian public, had the novel been published at the time, it would doubtless have been shockingly 'outspoken'; for the modern reader there is the familiarly frustrating sense of not quite enough said or

worked out. Again Schreiner's deep-rooted uncertainty and confusion as a woman artist seem to fail her as a feminist. She hopes her writing has the power to change the inequality between the sexes. On the one hand she is determined that her novel will, more than any other piece of work,

help other people, for it will help to make men more tender to women, because they will understand them better; it will make some women more tender to others; it will comfort some women by showing them that others have felt as they do. (66)

Five years later she is able to appreciate the magnificent first section of the book: "~~My Prelude is too lovely for any words~~", yet bitterly attack ~~the~~ the very source of such powerful creativity: "The worst of this book of mine is that it's so womanly. I think it's the most womanly book that ever was written, and God knows that I've willed it otherwise." (67)

In spite of herself, then - or at least one part of that complex self - Schreiner has achieved a remarkable and moving celebration of womanhood with From Man to Man, a book dedicated to her sister and daughter, both of whom died tragically young. The novel opens with "the agony of childbirth"; throughout the book mothering in many forms plays a large part, whether it be the grotesque parody of maternal care played out by the imprisoned Bertie with her three pet kittens in London, or Rebekah's productive, active, ceaseless child-bearing, child-rearing, and housekeeping in the leafy suburbs of Cape Town. With the reappearance at Thorn Kloof of Rebekah and her family in Chapter Three, the author notes with sardonic detachment that, "she seemed always to be having a baby or nursing it, or to be otherwise engaged". (68) The domestic routines of the woman, 'otherwise engaged' in cooking, cleaning, sewing, gardening, inspire the 'soft, heavy, continuous' <sup>(see p. 23)</sup> narrative voice of this novel. Women's interaction constantly takes place amidst such domestic work scenes. Little of the Gothic

melodrama of Undine or the symbolic spirituality of The Story of An African Farm remain here.

However, the sense of creativity and contentment evoked by Rebekah's mothering role is constantly depicted as fragile, fleeting:

And Rebekah was happy. It was one of those peaceful, halcyon times that come in life, when the absence of new daily recurring matter of pain makes possible that upspringing of joy which only that which morning by morning tramples it down can permanently keep out of life.

She was happy when she kneaded her bread or mixed the salads in the pantry; and when she sat at work at the children's clothes; it gave her exquisite pleasure to see the great streaks of yellow afternoon sunshine lie on the carpet, and at night it was a pleasure to lie awake and hear the branches of the trees move against the roof. (69)

The 'daily recurring... pain' is inflicted from outside by the callous behaviour and casual affairs of her cold and cruelly promiscuous husband Frank, knowledge of which the usually sensitive Rebekah attempts to deny. When the servant boy pays particular attention to her domestic needs, "she fancied she caught him looking at her almost with a pitying, questioning look, which she fancied must be because he realised that physical work was usually hard for her". (70) Her maternal instinct encourages such blinkered sight. As she lies awake at night, exhausted, pregnant, and unable to sleep,

her thoughts went to the man in the next room ... with his soft light hair pressed to the pillow and his strong shoulder showing above the cover. A great tenderness swept over her as when one thinks of one's child, as if all the heart were being drawn out of her to him. The beautiful boy, the father of all her children! (71)

'All the heart' of her own body is transferred to his; Rebekah is as oppressed by her own stereotypically female urge towards self-annihilation as she is by Frank's jovial complacency and possessiveness of his pure "little woman".

Self-abnegation is once again shown by Schreiner to be a possible form of release when Rebekah realises the full implications of Frank's unfaithfulness. Her instinctive impulse to kill both herself and her

children "born of lust and falsehood", (72) and her unconsciously succinct appraisal of the situation coming "from a voice outside herself" - "You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" (73) - are deliberately suppressed. "That quiet onlooking self, which, except in moments of rare anguish of body and soul, can always regain the mastery, woke in her." (74) She reflects on a life of altruism, a way of surviving through the serving of others. Depicted here by Schreiner with a heightened, religious fervour, this seems a dangerously seductive retreat from a feminist analysis of Rebekah's situation. She sees

for the first time the green and golden glory of the light shining through the young oak leaves and the bright shafts shooting through the dark branches of the pine wood and the soft moist earth below . . .

Such denial of self is transformed into a re-birth; a starting again:

When all hope is dead in your own life, is there yet nothing left to live for? Are there not others? She stood looking at the morning world, like a soul come back from a long journey; then she walked in at the little gate. (75)

Full of renewed hope Rebekah goes to see Frank's cast-off mistress, the young servant girl, who treats her scornfully with self-protective insults. Rebekah is silenced by her defensive contempt. Her puny body bedecked in Frank's gifts of finery, she too is pregnant. It is a poignant scene of unacknowledged sisterhood and shared suffering. "Then, as Rebekah looked at her, Rebekah knew that it was with that girl even as it was with herself that day." (76)

Schreiner's acute observation of the social power games played by oppressor and victim throughout the novel is impressively sensitive to subtle changes of tone, action and reaction. The plight of the black servant girl is not treated with sentimentality, nor is it dismissed as inferior in any way to Rebekah's suffering. The confrontations between Rebekah and the sulky, adolescent schoolgirl whom Frank seduces are

portrayed with similar forthright sympathy, remorselessly exposing at the same time the tension engendered between women as antagonists in the struggle for sexual possession.

Marion Friedmann has noted of Undine that the novel is "hag-ridden by what we might call the older-woman figure". (77) This sinister, vindictive female appears in many forms in From Man to Man: the grumbling, insensitive old Ayah who rails against the strangeness of the child Rebekah in the Prelude; the cold cattiness of Veronica and Mrs. Drummond, instrumental in prolonging Bertie's suffering, and who are replaced later on by Bertie's aunt, and the boy Isaac's mother in the household of the Jew.

Schreiner constantly highlights the repression created for both sexes by an adherence to male and female stereotypes: the shallow cruelty and competitiveness of Mrs. Drummond and Veronica feed the predatory hypocrisy of Frank and his club friends. To protect herself from the inevitable hostility of the other young and marriageable girls in Cradock, home of her aunt and uncle, Bertie submerges herself in domestic toil. Repapering, re-furbishing, cooking, cleaning, sewing - through a desperate channelling of her hunted fear into domestication, Bertie poses no sexual threat, and is accepted. Once her sexuality is brutally exposed as the details of her seduction become known, she is heartlessly ostracized.

Rebekah is seen by other women in the early years of her marriage as a comfortingly androgynous figure. "Veronica said some people were born with those mannish ways. It was not Rebekah's mother's fault, as she was quite a sweet womanly woman." (78) In realising the independent, self-assertive side of her nature, the "vague, insatiable hunger" (79) for new experiences, Rebekah escapes from the traditional model of femininity. She digs her garden, mends a chimney, renovates her own farmhouse, appears

publicly without wearing stays. As she becomes more entrenched in the pettiness and repetition of domestic life, and the enervating tasks of a mother and wife, Rebekah longs to experience the physical strength of maleness: "How nice ... to be a man." (80) She achieves, through a strange mixture of fantasy and protective altruism, a liberation, not of self, but from self.

The focal importance of her 'room of her own' (see pp.171 - 174) emphasizes this sense of retreat and enclosure; it is both a sanctuary and an enclosed, cell-like space. It is here that Rebekah becomes aware of her true potential for freedom, after delivering her ultimatum to Frank and his eventual awakening to her seriousness and purpose:

When her husband had closed the door of her study. Rebekah stood silent for a moment looking at it. Then she sat down in her armchair and leaned her head back against it. She folded her hands over her head and looked up at the little ceiling. She drew a long breath; but it was not the ceiling of the little room she saw as she sat there staring upwards. It was as though a vast dome were reared over her, as though a dark pall, which for years had been stretched out just above her, were folded up and removed and she looked up into almost infinite space. So wide, so still, so peaceful; - and she was alone there!

After half an hour she stood up; as she turned out the lamp and lit the candle to take to the room, a curious sensation came to her, as if she were a little child again. Even the candle she had lighted and held in her hand seemed like candles used to long ago. At the door of the room she turned and looked back; she seemed to have come from a long journey and to be seeing it all again ... it seemed as if some great crease of anguish which had lain in her brain for years had smoothed itself out. (81)

Her room 'expands', its physical limits dissolve, with her own rising consciousness of freedom. Schreiner takes us back to the candle's "lights and shadows" of the Child's Day (82) as Rebekah regains her ability to exist for herself alone.

It is perhaps the most affirmative moment of the novel, more hopeful of an awakening of a feminist consciousness than all the impassioned

rhetoric and close argument of the long propagandist sections. This is directly linked to Rebekah's own experience of oppression and her success in confronting and overcoming that. Yet she does so at the cost of her own sexuality. With her separation from Frank she gains a celibate inner strength and tranquility, while he maintains his previous standards of deceit, promiscuity and exploitation. Her awakening does not have the power to alter his perceptions; she remains an outsider, special, courageous and ultimately impotent.

Potential for progress lies only in her maternal role, it seems, in educating her children and teaching them tolerance and sensitivity. Rebekah herself now has "a repose about the face that was perhaps not really rest but calm". (83) While she and Drummond, the novel's 'New Man', share an intellectual understanding of experience, a shared life for them within the confines of the book seems an impossibility. In the final chapter there is a sense of restlessness, doubt, futility in Rebekah's thought and actions. As she re-arranges the pantry she reflects that "It was not really necessary; there was sewing that needed even more to be done, but she felt she did not wish to sit still ... Was it worth doing, was anything worth doing?" (84)

In a conversation with Drummond her garden becomes a symbol for her feelings of enclosed helplessness:

'There's a pleasure', she said, 'if you have a very small space, in seeing how much will live in it'. 'Yes', he said, looking somewhat abstractedly at the garden. 'I've sometimes thought that a life itself might be lived more satisfactorily a little hedged about with narrow conditions which compelled one to expand oneself in that circle - there's such a thing as being dissipated with too large a horizon and too much liberty to expand in it'. 'If the hedges are too close around, they may kill the plants', she said quickly ..." (85)

Rebekah's tensions are absorbed in the final part of the novel into elevated discussions on the nature of Art. Her voice of uncertainty and



claustrophobic urgency becomes, in conversation with Drummond, the reasoning, reflective, de-personalized voice of the previous passages of didactic and political argument. Again individual conflict can be seen to be integrated into the vast process of life itself:

No human soul is so lonely as it feels itself, because no man is merely an individual but is a part of the great body of life; the thoughts he thinks are part of humanity's thoughts, the visions he sees are part of humanity's visions; the artist is only an eye in the great human body, seeing for those who share his life: somewhere, sometime, his own exist. (86)

Through the creative process comes a power of sorts; Rebekah links it to childbirth and her own experience of suffering:

I cannot feel there is anything ignoble in the wish that when we pass, the thing we love should live on its own life. Even a woman feels that when she gives birth to a child; though, if she has loved the man she lived with, she has not conceived it for the good it might do or the beauty it might show - yet, even then, when she is in the agony of childbirth [echoes of the opening sentence of the novel] the thought will flash in her with sudden joy, 'Perhaps it will live on when I am gone and be the beautiful and the good to others'; and the thought gives her joy ... (87)

The constant frustration and anguish Schreiner suffered in the writing of From Man to Man corresponds to this 'agony' of childbirth. The "absolutely conflicting ideals" (88) Rebekah struggles with are Schreiner's own. Her ability to express them so boldly yet sensitively through Rebekah's story of sexual betrayal is the novel's greatest strength; its weakness is Schreiner's inability to come to terms with her heroine's own sexuality. Her proposed ending for the book, which she confided to a close friend of the time, Karl Pearson, went some way towards acknowledging women's sexual energy; Drummond leaves Rebekah, despising her for staying with her husband. Rebekah finds Bertie dying of syphilis and prophesies a future of love, equality and open sexual expression. Rebekah is finally able to reveal her awareness of her own sex-parasitism to her husband who criticises her for burying Bertie publicly, telling her she too has been living as a prostitute for the last fourteen years.

In the years of writing the novel, Schreiner was surrounded by men and women examining and attempting to resolve these very questions of sex differences, instincts, and the problem of prostitution. Yet she herself was ultimately unable to face such exploration in her book. As First and Scott point out, many of the most significant parts of the novel are unwritten: Bertie's life as a prostitute, Frank's courtship of Rebekah, Rebekah's feelings - other than intellectual ones - for Drummond. "Rapport with a man, to be meaningful, can be only a communion of the soul." (89)

Rebekah retreats inward, just as Schreiner turned to the abstract and idealized world of her allegories. Rebekah can fantasize about a coming together with Drummond, when she would invite him into her private sanctum and "show him great piles of notes and writing on Woman". (90) But Schreiner does not allow this to happen. When Drummond invites Rebekah to see his collection of fossils, describing the possibilities of shared study and independence - "They are in an outer room on the other side of the house; I have two rooms there; you would interfere with no-one" (91) - Rebekah rejects the invitation. Dream life and real life, personal questioning and social solution, remain divided.

Must this division in Schreiner's work be dismissed finally then as failure on her part, a failure to bring together the roles of woman and writer? In assessing her work as a major contribution to the feminist tradition it becomes clear that this fragmentation can be seen in a much more positive light.

Critic after critic has furthered the fragmentation process by isolating aspects of Schreiner's writing for close analysis, and rejecting others as detrimental to his or her\* chosen interpretation of

\* (such as Buchanan-Gould and Hobman)  
Female critics are also unfortunately at fault here, conditioned by what Dale Spender has called "the systematic pattern of the treatment of women's intellectual contribution in a male-dominated society". See Women of Ideas, (Ark Paperbacks 1983), p.28.

'Olive Schreiner'. Her husband's biography is first in a series of such distorting portrayals of the woman; significantly, some of Olive's women friends refused to lend their help with this, describing it angrily as "Cronwright's autobiography of his wife". (92)

As First and Scott remark:

Since her death she has been seen as a novelist who never mastered the form; as a poet rather than a novelist; as a visionary rather than a cogent political thinker. In her lifetime she was similarly contained. (93)

Such devaluation of both ideas and style is seen by Dale Spender as typical of traditional (male) critical techniques:

We find Aphra Behn was too bawdy, Mary Wollstonecraft too rambling and too unsystematic, Catherine Macaulay too dense. . . . We are told that it is difficult to understand the appeal of Harriet Martineau's immensely popular writing, and that Margaret Fuller, while she was a good conversationalist, unfortunately could not write! (94)

'Too' rambling, 'too' unsystematic, 'too' dense for what imposed norm of expression? In overstepping the narrow, male-defined bounds of acceptable literary convention these women are dismissed, their achievements go unrecognized. It is interesting that Johannes Meintjes should so vehemently condemn an aspect of Schreiner's creativity which is becoming increasingly valuable to women writers as a source of self-discovery and enlightenment:

The morbidity of so much of Olive Schreiner's jottings in her journal must not be taken too seriously . . . obviously she only remembered her journal when she was in a particular state of depression or illness, turning it into a kind of agony confessional which is totally misleading. She was an intensely lively person, not without mischief, easily amused and full of laughter [i.e. quite normal, in fact!] - but of this there is hardly a glimmer in her journals or, for that matter, in many of her writings. The moment Olive Schreiner put pen to paper her sense of humour, with rare exception, deserted her. (95)

Such 'rare exceptions' are valued by a similarly blinkered critic, Dan Jacobson, who sees Schreiner's "real seriousness" to be found "in

those passages of broad, shameless farce which help so much to make The Story of an African Farm still a living book today". (96)

Schreiner took her own 'jottings' very seriously, as did her heroine Rebekah, whose inner life in all its fragmented variety, is contained in such notebooks:

One book was a diary full of small daily entries, a book read, a visit found [sic], seeds planted, but once or twice working out great plans for the life that was to be lived - countries to be visited - books to be written - scientific knowledge to be gained - all written with absolute confidence. Now and then there were passionate personal entries, almost incoherent little calls for love and friendship ..... (97)

Patricia Meyer Spacks sees this peculiarly feminine form of ordering experience as a very positive one, an "implicit assertion that this life makes sense", "a way for the author to remind herself of the value of her own experience, to hold on to the meaning of her life". (98) If Meintjes chooses to see it as 'totally misleading' it is surely because it poses an extremely vital threat to his own, deadeningly narrow, assessment of Olive Schreiner, the 'artist'. As First and Scott make clear, Meintjes fails to realise the full importance of the diary form for women because of his rejection of "the peculiarly fragmented nature of their daily lives". (99) What he and other notable critics of Schreiner's work studiously ignore is that "that filter which is a woman's way of looking at life has the same validity as the filter which is a man's way". (100)

Doris Lessing's heroine Anna Wulf keeps four notebooks because she recognises that in her daily life "she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness - of breakdown". (101) Throughout the Notebooks Lessing states:

people have discussed, theorised, dogmatised, labelled, compartmented ... But they have also reflected each other, been aspects of each other, given birth to each other's thoughts and behaviour - are each other, form wholes. (102)

Similar interaction of 'selves' is born out of the conflict of Schreiner's work: "I really don't know whether I am I or one of the others."

However, the framework of The Golden Notebook is, obviously, markedly different from that of From Man to Man. Lessing's novel is written "as if the attitudes that have been created by the Women's Liberation Movement already existed"; the book assumes "a crystallisation of information in society which has not yet taken place". (103) Some sixty years before this, in her unfinished novel, Schreiner was in the process of working towards such a crystallisation. Paradoxically, her firm belief in the potential interdependence of the sexes can be seen as furthering the fragmentation. Dale Spender points out that:

when those without power try to cultivate the good will and understanding of those with power, they are often doomed to disappointment and may even intensify their internalisation of oppression.

She feels Schreiner's solution was one "which is not uncommon among women: unable to 'blame' men, she blamed herself". (104)

In the stories of Undine, Lyndall and Rebekah such disappointment and internalizing of oppression can be painfully felt. Schreiner delved deep into the fragmentary nature of female experience and portrayed what she found with courage and honesty. Her contribution to the feminist tradition of affirming the value of such experience and realising the need for such self-exploration must, as Spender concludes, be celebrated and not devalued. (105) Schreiner and her heroines were ultimately 'broken' but not 'untried'. She opened up the possibilities for women writers, although unable to see those possibilities through herself in her work, and within the society in which she lived.

cont. →

Adrienne Rich has written of the times:

when we have to take ourselves more seriously or die;  
when we have to pull back from the incantations,  
rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly  
and disenfranchise ourselves, bestow  
ourselves to silence, or a severer listening, cleansed  
of oratory, formulas, choruses, laments ... (106)

Olive Schreiner provided such a 'cleansing' process through her courageous writing. Perhaps more painfully than many of the early feminist writers breaking new ground, she felt that:

cutting-away of an old force that held her  
rooted to an old ground  
the pitch of utter loneliness  
where she herself and all creation  
seem equally dispersed, weightless, her being a cry  
to which no echo comes or can ever come. (107)

CHAPTER II 'BUT I'M NOT A WOMAN ...'

STEREOTYPES AND SELF-IMAGE

1. RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter deals with Schreiner's attitudes to gender through her revelations in letters and in her relationships. The following one will turn back again to the fiction to see how she copes creatively with themes of sexuality and self-fulfilment there. At the outset of writing both I am aware once more of the need to justify my intentions and clarify my critical position.

Certain problems and difficulties immediately present themselves. Firstly, there is a sense of uneasiness about delving into the private life of a woman writer for the purposes of literary study, so strengthening that powerful ideology which has for so long centred and confined woman in the realm of such inner experience and personal relations. I shall defend such a biographical approach in due course, remaining fully aware of its potential to misrepresent and caricature. Secondly, the whole notion of a 'female imagination' in relation to Schreiner's own thoughts and feelings about writing as a woman must be tackled. Does such a thing exist? Did Schreiner believe in it? Do I believe in it? What significance do I attach to the problematic word 'female'? ... Like Elaine Showalter, I feel 'uncomfortable' with the theory of a specifically female sensibility which "runs dangerously close to reiterating the familiar stereotypes." (1) It seems impossible to point to an innately 'female' way of perceiving, and writing about, the world when we consider the complex network of

influences, social, political, historical, which mould and distort a woman's sense of identity. \*

There are no clear messages in Schreiner's writing which echo a consistently authentic and separate female voice. Such clarity would surely be too much to expect of any woman writing then. However, many women, like Schreiner, were struggling to achieve a clearer definition of selfhood through the writing process - a recovery of a sense of self not consciously named 'female' or 'separate' but which did break away from artificial concepts of femininity towards, in Lyndall's words, a state of 'being' rather than 'seeming'. Schreiner's marginalized position as a white colonial woman writer provided her with a perspective from which to challenge, through her fluid, questioning writing methods and characterization, social as well as literary norms. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her study of the relationship of gender to the narrative form (2), suggests that in this anarchic, rebellious reaction to the conventional restrictive rules for creating a novel's shape, lies the "novelist's femaleness"; in Virginia Woolf's words this consists in "leaving a blank or outraging our sense of probability." (3) DuPlessis' interpretation of Schreiner sheds new light on the significant unwritten parts of the unfinished From Man to Man which First and Scott comment on. (4) An exploration of these and other 'blanks' in Schreiner's texts could prove an interesting area of further study. In portraying "failure and maladaptation", notes DuPlessis, Schreiner could evoke stories "with a powerful cultural presence" and "rupture the continuity of their narrative existence." (5) (She echoes Woman and Labour here; see my next chapter, p. 69.) With the portrayal, discussed in Chapter 111, of characters like

\* I come up against this difficulty again in my fourth chapter in the exploration of women writers' sense of spirituality and the relationship of this to gender. See p. 130.



Gregory Rose and Veronica Grey, Schreiner showed "the suffering attendant upon sexual polarization or strictly held difference; in Lyndall and her romance plot, [she] dramatized the internal self-division and damage of gender scripts." (6)

The fact that Schreiner was constantly questioning the limitations of enforced femininity and masculinity - the dilemmas exposed in her letters and dealt with in her fiction - bear witness to this - demonstrates her awareness of the differences between biological and cultural notions of male and female. Like Ann Oakley, almost a century later, Schreiner was making such distinctions and drawing attention to both "the constancy of sex" and "the variability of gender." (7) In doing so, she did not opt for the androgynous 'selves' (see DuPlessis, p. 63) of Virginia Woolf's characters who

have stepped beyond the sex-gender system as a whole, with its claims to natural, universal status, its manners and morals, its sexual polarization, its gender asymmetry, its devaluation of the female and the homosexual. (8)

In the very uncertainty over self-identity and definition in her writing, Olive Schreiner highlights the continuing conflicts of the time within sexual politics; instead of transcending them she grapples with their meanings.

Pertinent here is Patricia Stubbs' observation that the tradition of women in fiction has "grown to some extent out of the historical reality of women's experience, but it owes even more to the ideology which developed to disguise that experience." (9) As an introduction, then, to this study of the 'reality' of Schreiner's life through a close look at her correspondence and friendships, it would, I think, be valuable to examine that disguising ideology, that is, to pinpoint the concepts of 'femaleness', both orthodox and alternative, which were available to Schreiner in the late nineteenth century. I shall continue such observations at points throughout the chapter, in order to establish

connections between biography and theory, personal experience and cultural context. In doing so I do not intend to go over the same ground as First and Scott in their excellent coverage of Schreiner's years in England and subsequent return to South Africa (see First and Scott, chapters 4 and 5). Drawing on the wealth of Schreiner's personal correspondence I will look at biographical details of several key relationships in the conviction that Schreiner's problems are not in any way 'neurotic' but rather representative and indicative of larger cultural issues directly affecting women. Although I shall be foregrounding her particular emotional experiences I intend to hold the wider cultural context in mind throughout.

Showalter has identified three phases of development evident in literary subcultures which correspond to similar stages in the female literary tradition:

First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, Feminine, Feminist, and Female.  
(10)

This mapping-out of a difficult ideological terrain is helpful, especially if one stresses Showalter's own point that these categories can be flexible and interchangeable, and can all be found, as they are, I think, with Schreiner, in the career of a single writer. She sees these elements as also corresponding to "periods of crisis when a shift of literary values occurred":

the feminine phase as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840's to the death of George Eliot in 1880; the feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the female phase as 1920 to the present. (11)

This literary categorisation unfortunately leaves out the influential early

radicalism of the turn-of-the-century Owenites. (12) Their Utopian visions of an equal society challenged the sexual division of labour and insisted on a restructuring of sexual relationships and the family, and were to re-emerge in the socialist aspirations of the 'New Life' just as Schreiner entered the British arena of sexual politics in the '80's.

At that time a closely interconnecting network of socialist women were involved in single-issue campaigns (Showalter's 'Feminist' phase), working to bring about radical changes and new liberties in women's lives. Many of these women became personally known to Olive \* and close alliances were formed and information and influences shared with such diverse feminists as Constance Lytton (prison reform, militant suffragism); Annie Besant (birth control); Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (health and medicine); Edith Lees, political organiser and England's first open lesbian feminist; and Eleanor Marx whose intimate relationship with Olive I explore late in this chapter. Schreiner's feminism, then, was enriched by her involvement with such activists, many of whom were also taking part in the newly-developing discussion groups concerned with the more personal and intimate issues of sexuality and gender-identity.

Directly influenced by such fluid and stimulating political action over such questions as free unions between women and men, the validity of homosexual love, of women's control over their bodies, of sex for pleasure as well as procreation, of woman as an autonomous sexual being with desires equal to man's, were also two leading male thinkers and writers of the

\* I acknowledge a great debt here to Liz Stanley, whose recent research into OS's 'web of friendships' and determinedly 'anti-biographical' approach to Schreiner's life (an approach with which I am largely in sympathy) opens up new possibilities for feminist study. See Liz Stanley, 'Feminism and Friendship: two essays on Olive Schreiner' in Studies in Sexual Politics, no. 8 (University of Manchester)

period, Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, lasting friends of Schreiner's. Similarities in ideas on sex and gender are to be found throughout the work of these three colleagues, with Schreiner, to my mind, offering the most consistently radical and feminist view of the 'Woman Question'.

In a sensitive introduction to a recent collection of Carpenter's writing, (13) Noël Greig describes a man remarkably similar in outlook to Schreiner:

He wished to link all aspects of himself - the inner and the outer, the intellectual and the spiritual, the physical and the emotional - with all aspects of the world. So then, his work is a reflection of his preoccupations, desires, actions, dreams and experiences, and as such it bears all the marks of life's ups and downs. If we look into his life, we can see beyond a seemingly disconnected series of writings to patterns of thought running through all, emerging at times in one form, at times another, sometimes forcefully and sometimes falteringly ... (14)

His striving towards a unity in all things, his sense that "the personal self can only 'survive' by ever fading and changing towards the universal .. Continual expansion is a normal condition of consciousness" (15) was one of Schreiner's central preoccupations, as was his insistence on a new relationship between the sexes, when woman "is able to face man on an equality; to find, self-balanced, her natural relation to him; and to dispose of herself and of her sex perfectly freely, and not as a thrall must do." (16)

What is most striking about Carpenter is his linking of his own experience as a homosexual man to the oppressed state of woman. This enabled him to connect gay liberation with the struggle of women and the "strangely accentuated and exaggerated" gender-division (17) which Schreiner examined and gave fictional form to throughout her writing life. Like Schreiner, he also saw similarities between the women's movement and the labour movement:

In many respects the newer Women and the Workmen resemble each other. Both have been bullied and sat upon from time

immemorial, and are beginning to revolt; both are good at detailed and set or customary work, both are bad at organisation; both are stronger on the emotional than on the intellectual side; and both have an ideal of better things, but do not quite see their way to carry it out. (18)  
(Cf. Woman and Labour, pp. 121-125)

These sentences come from his popular study of sexuality and oppression, Love's Coming-Of-Age, which went through eleven editions between 1896 and 1919, although subject, like much of Ellis' work, to publishers' paranoia during a spate of Obscene Publications trials at the centre of which was the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895. In this section Carpenter reveals his inability (completely) to reject prevalent sex, and class, stereotyping. Ideas about woman's basic inability to organise, about her emotionalism and lack of rationality, were commonly held assumptions of the mid-century, extolled by anti-feminists such as Ruskin and Eliza Linton, and were still dominating current attitudes to gender roles. Indeed, Carpenter stereotypes feminists in Love's Coming-Of-Age in much the same way as Linton had done in her damning description of such 'modern man-haters' in 1883 (see my Introduction, p. 4). Although in agreement with their action and ideals, Carpenter could see many feminists as deviant, lacking strong sexual or maternal instincts, and some as "mannish" if not "homogenic" (lesbian), and "ultra-rationalising and brain-cultured." (19) Such thinking was backed up by biological 'proof' evident in influential evolutionist works like Geddes' and Thomson's The Evolution of Sex (1889), which linked male logic and aggression and female intuition and passivity to the pattern of cell metabolism: "The hungry, active cell becomes flagellate sperm, while the quiescent, well-fed one becomes an ovum." (20)

Similarly, we can now be disappointed by Ellis' memorably infuriating announcement that 'women's brains were in their wombs' (21) in his pioneering studies of sexual psychology - despite the fact that much of his exploration into types of sexual experience, woman's sexual autonomy,

masturbation and homosexuality can be seen as being innovative. \*

I would agree with Phyllis Grosskurth, though, when she suggests Ellis was an 'anthropologist' rather than a 'psychologist' of sex. His Studies are coldly mechanistic for the most part, lacking any real psychological depth and imaginative insight into his 'cases'. As with the work of Carpenter, we can see some of his ideological limitations echoed in Schreiner's ideas and writings on the female condition. For instance, his theory of woman as a passive receptacle, an instrument from which the man drew music, (22) is reaffirmed by Schreiner in her portrayal of Rebekah and Frank's sexual relationship in From Man to Man. (23) Passages of Love's Coming-Of-Age are also to be found echoed in Schreiner's writing. Carpenter's description of male passion as "the little fire with which he toys, and which every now and then flares out and burns him up. His affections, his passions are probably as a rule stronger than woman's." (24) is reflected in Lyndall's acerbic comments to Waldo about the male / female capacities to love. (25)

In such an era of challenges to the status quo, the breaking of barriers in materialist areas of legal and educative rights for women as well as in sexual ideology and attempts to restructure personal relationships, orthodox writers pressed home the moral necessity for sexual division. An article for the Girl's Own Paper of March 1884, entitled 'Woman: What is her Appointed Position and Work?' by E.B. Leach, demands of the sexes:

‡ His ideas about lesbianism, however, were far from radical, and markedly confused. Lillian Faderman has analysed very incisively the contradictions present in his concept of the "true invert". She notes that he "rejected as being 'spurious imitations' all manifestations of same-sex love that proved it was entirely common; he characterized as being indicative of 'true inversion' any trait that could be identified as morbid - a marked neuropathic heredity, a strain of violence, a penchant for transvestism - and he coupled these ills with feminism." See Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men (Junction Books, 1981), p. 247. It is at least arguable that Schreiner's own reticence about physical intimacy between women (see pp. 68j-68k) was affected by Ellis' views.

Let each fill their separate sphere of usefulness, and there need be no detracting of worth on either part; but interfere, or tread one on the other's ground, and we have the result in a feminine man, or a masculine woman; either, or both, of which is an aversion to both sexes. (26)

Despite his own practical attempts to step out of these culturally conditioned 'separate spheres of usefulness' in his own relationships and domestic arrangements at Millthorpe with male lovers, Carpenter still could demonstrate the odd moment of blinkered vision in his work:

Man, the ordinary human male, is a curious animal. While mastering the world with his pluck, skill, enterprise, he is in matters of love for the most part a child ... In this he differs from the other sex; and the difference can be seen in earliest years. When the boy is on his rocking horse, the girl is caressing her doll. (27) (My emphases.)

(Pertinent, perhaps, to note here that he felt Love's Coming-Of-Age, in fact, "ought, of course ... to have been written by a woman ..." (28) It is interesting to compare that with Schreiner's feeling that From Man to Man was too 'womanly' a novel. (29) The preconceptions about what was fitting male / female subject matter, the range of notions of male and femaleness - the 'variability of gender' - and Carpenter's and Schreiner's own ambivalent relationships to accepted stereotypes are indicated here.) Carpenter's image, in the above quotation, of the little girl 'caressing her doll' in an early enacting of the maternal role for which she is, presumably, 'innately' equipped, calls into question another major condition of 'true femaleness', motherhood. I deal with the implications of this for Schreiner later in this, and my third and final chapters. Suffice to say here that Carpenter, Ellis and Schreiner all hymn the praises of the "sacredness of the mother-feeling in woman" (30), and this greatly determined, in varying degrees, their ideas about woman's position in a new social order.

I have dwelt long enough here on the retrogressive elements in

Carpenter's and Ellis's work. It is easy now to be suddenly shocked by such incidental sexist assumptions as Carpenter's conviction that "I think every woman, in her heart of hearts, wishes to be ravished; but naturally (!) it must be by the right man." (31) - instead of recognising the truly radical elements of their theory, such as Carpenter's advocacy of contraception, 'On Preventive Checks in Population', in Love's Coming-Of-Age, accompanied as it is by the awareness that "here - as so often in matters of sex - the man's satisfaction is largely at the cost of the woman." (32)

As Sheila Rowbotham reminds us, Carpenter, and Ellis and Schreiner lived and worked in the context of a determinist form of marxism. of eugenic assumptions in which a wide range of acquired characteristics like drunkenness and criminality were still being seen as biologically inherited. (33)

They, and many other socialists and feminists like them, were attempting to assert a dialectic between personal sexual life and the institutions of society in the effort to understand the relationships of subjective consciousness and external social relations, with inadequate theoretical equipment. (34)

An awareness of this must colour my ensuing interpretation of Schreiner's attitudes to self and gender, yet it also serves to highlight the advances she made, "sometimes forcefully and sometimes falteringly", towards achieving a sense of 'self-balance' and a realisation of what Carpenter called "the wealth and variety of affectional possibilities" (35) within social and sexual relationships.

In the following investigation I do not pretend to offer a portrait of 'the real Olive Schreiner' (see Liz Stanley, pp. 6-9; p. 72), being unwilling, as Stanley is, to reduce the complexity of one woman's personal life and political involvements to "one omnipotent view which articulates 'character' as an object-in-stasis." (36) My intention is not to offer a potted biography; I stick to a chronological presentation of developments within her close friendships because it is only thus that the 'to's and fro's' of her emotional, intellectual, and political life can, I think, be



most clearly seen as representative of what it was to be a woman writer then, and what bearing an assessment of such experience still has on our understanding of sexual politics today. In the contradictions of Schreiner's reactions to self and others can be found a protest against definition which was echoed by many women of the time. The anger which so often found expression in her letters as self-hatred, a desire for self-annihilation or a wish to transcend sexuality, was a raging against the limitations placed upon women by the dominant culture.

To read Olive's letters to her closest friends and intellectual colleagues is to be thrown into intimate contact with the frustrating confusion that was the late Victorian female's predicament. The longing to be a man, with all the enviable liberties that entailed, the determination to be an independent woman with all the sacrifices that dream called for - and where to fit in sex and love? Schreiner's impatient, energetic scrawl (she is messiest when most forthright and revealing in her correspondence) speaks powerfully of such dilemmas. I have already suggested in my first chapter that she backed away from full exploration of her heroines' sexual identities: to look now at her own sexual and emotional ambivalences placed in the context of the ideological variations, examined above, of the period, will, I hope, show why this was and to what extent such painful uncertainty was an intrinsic part of Ralph Iron, the public artist (or 'feminine feminist', to use Showalter's categories) and also of Olive Schreiner, the private woman (and 'feminist female').

I wish I was a man that I might be friends with all of you,  
but you know my sex must always divide. I only feel like a  
man but to you all I seem a woman! Has George's wife got her  
baby? ... (37)

Here is denial, frustration, maternal longing, exasperation in a characteristically paradoxical extract from Olive's lively correspondence

with fellow-writer and dreamer, Edward Carpenter, whose socialist and Utopian principles inspired her, and whose caring, undemanding friendship (as a homosexual) she valued greatly. Olive was constantly rejecting her gender in her struggle to relate equally to her closest male friends. Her femaleness was seen as a barrier preventing the perfect intellectual communion she rated so highly and which, as a writer, she demanded of herself and of her men friends in order to realise her full creative potential. But the physical and emotional stress such blocking off of her sexual needs must have provoked is often obvious in her letters.

In the previous extract, written from her favourite continental refuge at Alassio, we sense a desperate longing to escape the very semblance of womanhood, that life of mere 'seeming' that Lyndall so despises. Imprisoned by traditional expectations and stereotypes, she longs for a comradeship that transcends division by gender. Here also is evidence of Olive's passionate nature, a large part of which was governed by a strong maternal instinct. The passing reference to a friend's expected child may seem incidental. In fact, it betrays an ever-present tension in Olive's life and work. While she exalted motherhood as a vital source of power and creativity, and argued the case for recognition of woman's sexual needs on a par with man's, she also saw how both maternity and sexuality were manipulated by men to achieve the oppression and exploitation of women. In her fictional writing she sought to reflect such male dominance and female powerlessness, and also to challenge directly the accepted standards by creating new expectations and directions for her heroines.

Schreiner herself had difficulty in rejecting completely the rigid social differences which conditioned male and female behaviour of the time. Consequently she sometimes seems to despise her 'womanly' qualities of

feeling and intuition and aspire towards the 'manly' realm of power, control and intellect - this frequently as a means of escape from her inner tormented self. "You know I love you", she assures Havelock Ellis, "but one must check the expression of one's emotions or die". (38) "I am only by a fierce endeavour holding down all the old madness and misery and anguish that lies sleeping in my heart, ready to leap up the moment my power to hold it down goes ..." (39) Denying passion, and the 'madness and misery' of acknowledging dependencies, needs, desires, Schreiner asserts imperiously to Karl Pearson, for whom she felt great sexual attraction, "But I'm not a woman, I'm a man, and you are to regard me as such." (40) She struggles to convince herself that this attraction "is not sex-love. I do not love you as a woman loves a man; but as a soul loves itself. You will say 'Olive Schreiner you are deceiving yourself that is sex-love. I deny it". (41)

Olive dosed herself from time to time with bromide (42) to quieten this 'sex-love' which she continually denied. It is not difficult to understand why she found acknowledging her own sexuality so painful when we consider that for her at the heart of women's oppression was the sexual relationship:

... all other matters seem to me small compared to matters of sex, and prostitution is its most agonising central point. Prostitution, especially the prostitution of men of themselves to their most brutal level, can't really be touched till man not only says but feels woman is his equal ... (43)

She wrote and thought intensely about this potential equality in her work - towards an analysis of the complexity of sexual relationships and the private power games played out by men and women and reinforced in social structures. In order to retain some detachment as a writer and autonomy and independence as a woman, she tried to <sup>break free from</sup> these bonds and roles in her personal life by shunning the physical. It was never easy. "I

am always conscious that I am a woman when I am with you, but it is to wish I were a man that I might come near to you", she confesses to Karl Pearson. (44) Writing to Edward Carpenter about the onset of menstruation and the prospect of menopause she seems to welcome the loss of this manifestation of her femaleness:

I won't be a woman in a couple of years. I began to be one when I was only ten so I dare say I will leave off being one in about two or perhaps three more, and then you'll think I am a man, all of you won't you? Karl Pearson and everyone, and will be comrades with me. (45)

It may seem strange that such a strong-minded feminist who devoted her working life to the 'Woman Question' should sometimes seem to despise her own sex. But we must remember that outside Olive's intimate circle of radical thinkers, political poets and feminist activists was a late Victorian society from whose rigid ideals of manliness and womanliness even an outspoken writer could not break free. Olive condemns From Man to Man for being a 'womanly book'; she proudly describes her husband to Louie Ellis as "a real man". (46) In the popular literature of the time such distinctions were constantly reinforced.

Passionate ambition, virile energy, the love of strong excitement, self-assertion, fierceness, an undisciplined temper, are all qualities which detract from her ideal of womanliness, and which make her less beautiful than she was meant to be. (47)

So writes Eliza Linton in her account of 'Womanliness', while Ruskin, in a widely admired and quoted essay, "Of Queens' Gardens", expects even more of the perfect Angel in the House:

She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise - wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation; wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fall from his side; wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable modesty of service - the true changefulness of woman .. (1865) (48)

Schreiner consistently challenged, for the most part, this way of thinking, but the tenaciousness of such sexist ideology and the pressures it exerted should not be underestimated. Ruskin's work was still popular and influential well into the 1880's.

We have already seen that Schreiner's heroines, while breaking out of the traditional mould and aspiring towards individual fulfilment and (cont. on next page)

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self-development, also possess marked tendencies towards self-renunciation. Olive's own impulse to repress her wants and desires, the 'masculine' manifestations of her personality - passion, ambition, assertiveness - was surely influenced by the prevalent doctrine of self-abnegation, however much she rebelled against it in theory.

"What would you ask me to pray for for you if praying was any use?" she asks Edward Carpenter, in a mood of deep despondency. "I would ask you to pray that myself might die. I don't mean my body but all that longs or wishes for anything. It dies so slowly but it does die." (49)

In several letters to Carpenter she links this escape from self to an immersion in the process of writing.

It is only in work that has no connection with the self that we can find rest to our spirits. Life, personal life, is a great battlefield. Those who enter it must fight. Those who enter it and will not fight get riddled with bullets. The only thing for them is to keep out of it and have no personal life. This as much whether the object be love and sympathy as whether it be wealth and power. (50)

A year after this, encouraging Carpenter to work more, she writes, "Edward, you must write much. Make your life consist in that. You and I must have no personality. We must die while yet we live." (51)

This strong need to 'kill off' the self perhaps can be traced back to Olive's strict religious upbringing as well as to the current ideals of womanly self-control. In the first chapter of his portrait of Schreiner, Johannes Meintjes includes a revealing little anecdote about Olive (or Emily, as she was then called by the family) as a child, already struggling to control the dominant aspects of her personality. In a letter Rebecca Schreiner wrote to her daughter Kate at Burgersdorp she notes:

Emily is still rather self willed and impetuous, needing much patient firmness. It is however very pleasing to see the effort the dear little thing makes to conquer herself. She often asks, 'Mama, have I been a little better today?' (52)

Yet, as in other areas of her complex emotional life, Schreiner seems in later years to veer wildly between extremes. Her wish to 'conquer' self was matched by a desire to find, re-discover, explore the depths of her personality and to make connections between identity and sexuality. In a state of confusion she writes to Ellis:

Life would be so perfect, so beautiful, so divine, but I think I'm reaching a kind of Nirvana. I can't feel much personally, nor desire much for myself; that is passing. Self seems to be dead in me. Other people want to kill self, but I want so to wake mine to life again, but it won't wake. You know I didn't kill myself two years ago, but I really died then.\* It's so funny, I can't make anyone understand, I don't think I could describe it in a book; but I have died ... When I first knew you I kept thinking you would be able to bring my old self back to life again. (53)

Although Olive looked to her relationship with Havelock Ellis as a means of establishing her sense of identity, the familiar complications of sex and gender still made things difficult. Ellis wrote, shortly after their first meeting:

I shall always like to see you. We have so many experiences in common, so many thoughts and feelings that I feel as if you were somehow my sister. I really do not know anyone with whom I feel that I have so much in common. (54)

Olive agreed: "I wish I was really your sister, it would be very nice." (55)

Although Olive later confessed she had retired briefly to burst into tears of disappointment at their first encounter with each other, so different was Ellis to the god-like male she had imagined from their correspondence ("tall, grave, with curiously shifting eyes and a high,

\* This possibly refers to a seemingly masochistic relationship with a man during her stay at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight in the winter of 1881 - if she, as she often did, is getting her dates muddled up. In his biography of Ellis, Arthur Calder-Marshall reveals a love affair with "a man who was a sadist." (56) Meintjes accepts this account in his biography of Schreiner, but does not elaborate further. First and Scott quote from the Notes on Olive that Ellis made in 1885:

'He promised to come and stay with her for a week or so during the first holidays ... But he never came. At Guildford Street [where she lived the following year] she feared to go out of the house, lest he should come when she was away.' 'She says still quite calmly, 'I would like him to tread on me and stamp me fine into powder.' (57)

squeaky voice" (58)), she was soon very physically intimate with him.

His feelings do not seem to have matched up to her passionate assertiveness:

As I left her one evening to return home she raised her face up to me as we shook hands. I hesitated to realise the significance of the gesture, and we parted. But on my next visit, when the moment to part arrived, the gesture was more significantly repeated: she put her arms round me and from that moment our relationship became one of intimate and affectionate friendship. I hasten to add that it scarcely passed beyond that stage. (59)

There were so many roles for them to lapse into, fostering other dependencies, different desires, that they did not 'pass beyond that stage' of intimacy: brother/sister, doctor/patient, mother/child, self/ 'other-self'. But the sheer intensity of their relationship constantly revealed deep-rooted fears and uncertainties in both of them. Olive's high moral standards, and her expectations of the ideal relationship, clashed with her awareness of an awakened sexuality. Ellis realised that

she possessed a powerfully and physically passionate temperament which craved an answering impulse and might even under other circumstances .. be capable of carrying her beyond the creed of right and wrong which she herself fiercely held and preached. (60)

Even their happiest times together were clouded by moments of doubt and self-castigation. While the pair were holidaying together in Derbyshire in the summer of 1884, Ellis notes in his journal, amidst the accounts of picnics, country rambles, evenings of reading and writing together:

Last night we were both sad and cried. Olive felt as if it was wrong to be near me. She said that she thought that 'some day you will really care for someone, and then you will think this impure'. I think that that chiefly made me feel so miserable because it was not understanding ... She feels sometimes that she is not unselfish, but she is - very. I think that sometimes she distrusts herself a little somehow. That is not quite good. She has a desire - which seems a little morbid - to see everything from the standpoint of Providence, to be abnormally selfless. I think that it may be a reaction from an opposite state of mind. (61)



Olive found it impossible to accept her own needs, terrified of the implication of sexual excitement yet craving that very physicality in her relationships. Ellis needed her guilt-free love, wanted her to "belong to" him (62) in an asexual, exclusive relationship. Olive's health deteriorated steadily, and gradually she backed away from their former closeness. Frequently she had expressed fear of too deep an involvement both with him and consequently all levels of her being:

I am so afraid of caring for you much. I feel such a bitter feeling with myself if I feel I am perhaps going to. I think that is it. I feel like someone rolling a little ball of snow on a mountain side, and he knows at any minute it may pass out of his hand and grow bigger and bigger and go -- he knows not where. Yet, when I get a letter, even like your little matter-of-fact note this morning, I feel: 'But this thing is yourself.' In that you are myself I love you and am near to you; in that you are a man I am afraid of you and shrink from you. (63)

Adopting the protective guise of a 'man-friend', an asexual 'soul-mate' or a child in her most intimate correspondence with Ellis she, superficially at least, denied her sexuality and escaped for a while the responsibility of accepting her femaleness with all the problems that that, for a Victorian feminist, involved. Of course, as a woman writer she was all too aware that she was trespassing on what was traditionally male ground; although the publishing houses of the late 1880's handled an increasing number of women authors, the challenging outspokenness of Schreiner was a rarity. Women were not supposed to question, let alone write about, social structures and moral standards. The public field of politics and idealism was man's; the private world of emotions and relationships, home and family, woman's.

"Women", pronounced Captain Maxse, a prominent opponent of the suffrage bill,

seem to be incapable of sympathizing with great causes - they have a strong predilection for personal institutions. As a rule they are completely without interest in great national questions. Theirs is essentially the private life point of view. (64)

The female objectors to votes for women - and there were quite a number - were equally dogmatic:

Women will be more valuable citizens, will contribute more precious elements to the national life without the vote than with it. The quickness to feel, the willingness to lay aside prudential considerations in a right cause, which are amongst the peculiar excellencies of women, are in their right place when they are used to influence the more highly trained and developed judgement of men. But if this quickness of feeling could be immediately and directly translated into public action, in matters of vast and complicated political import, the risks of politics would be enormously increased, and what is now a national blessing might easily become a national calamity. (65)

This split between public and private was a difficult set of conditions for Schreiner to cope with. As a socialist writer, she wrote to challenge and change accepted modes of thought; she directed her strident personality outwards, her words for the complacent or the oppressed who were to be questioned or comforted. As a feminist writer, she wrote to affirm the value of women's experience and to explore that inner 'private' world of the female psyche. She constantly worried about the motives for this turning inwards to the personal. She was too influenced by the nineteenth century concept of femininity for such self-exploration to be completely commendable and guilt-free. (66) Selflessness was the required aim of woman, who must yet confine herself to the inner sphere of domesticity, subordinate to the men outside. Denial of the personal was also the prerogative of the male, who operated primarily within the public arena of professional work. (Of course my observations are confined here to the middle-classes to which Schreiner belonged.) Men and women gained their sense of identity by belonging to either one of these separate worlds. Small wonder that Schreiner, trying to break through such compartmentalising of the sexes, felt confused about her own gender.

Virginia Woolf has observed how difficult it was for the Victorian literary woman to write "as women write, not as men write" (67), how she

was constantly torn between admitting that she was 'only a woman' or protesting that she was 'as good as a man'. Schreiner, and her heroines, strive towards self-definition, and fluctuation between masculine and feminine identity is constantly evident, both in her personal correspondence and the lives and imaginations of the fictional females she creates. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, self-definition for the writer "necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative 'I AM' cannot be uttered if the 'I' knows not what it is". For the female writer too many "patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself" complicate that essential self-defining process. Hence the many shut-in, claustrophobic images which dominate women's writing of the time - and, as we have seen already, none more so than Schreiner's<sup>\*</sup> - as they struggled to break out into a separate, and female, sense of identity and creativity. They fought "in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture". (68)

Such illness, and fear of paralysing periods of stasis, and what often seemed like insanity, appear to have ruled Schreiner's life at times. On the one hand, such physical distress and feebleness was almost expected of the middle-class woman, an indication of her true femininity, so Olive could be seen in that sense as stereotypically 'female'. On the other hand, the paranoid fear of the intellectual woman as being somehow 'unnatural', often sterile, which was cultivated to keep women in their passive place, could infect the writers themselves; Olive's unease about her sexuality and her idealization of motherhood are doubtless results of this insidious male propaganda. Because of the fundamental idea that female psychology functioned simply as an extension of female

\* Reading her letters the feeling of an unidentified source of oppression is inescapable; she continually mentions 'iron weights', 'crushing', 'pressing down', 'suffocating'.

reproductivity, and that woman's nature was determined by her sex organs, any form of 'masculine' activity, like thinking and writing, was immediately seen to endanger her essential 'womanliness'.

The German scientist Moebius, in a study entitled Concerning the Physiological and Intellectual Weakness of Women<sup>(1900)</sup> stated categorically:

If we wish woman to fulfil the task of motherhood fully she cannot possess a masculine brain. If the feminine abilities were developed to the same degree as those of the male, her material organs would suffer and we should have before us a repulsive and useless hybrid. (69)

Similarly, Wendy Martin has noted how a Harvard doctor reported during his autopsy on a Radcliffe graduate how he discovered that her uterus had shrivelled to the size of a pea. (70) - Such scaremongering in the name of scientific research was common, and even Olive Schreiner could not remain untouched by it. (71)

It is difficult to tell to what extent Schreiner's maternal longings were prompted by a need to reject this image of barrenness and asexuality which invariably accompanied the intellectual woman. Certainly her desire for a child must also stem from her own difficult relationship with her mother and the sense of lack of love which resulted; she may well have wanted to fulfil the maternal role in a way in which Rebecca Schreiner, from whom Olive inherited her sharp intellect and ambition, was never able to do. (72) Weighed down, as Cronwright-Schreiner described her, by "forty years of labour, of the cooking of dinners, and the making of pairs of shoes, and the white-washing of rooms, and the sweeping of yards, and the rearing of one dozen babies" (73), that remarkable woman, hardened by pioneering drudgery and religious zeal, had little energy left to develop a loving relationship with her intractable, passionate daughter.

In later years, long after her mother's conversion to Catholicism and the establishment of some kind of reconciliation between the two after bitter periods of political and religious disagreement, Olive was to reverse the roles of mother and child in a characteristically ambivalent attempt to set up an identity for herself. She writes to 'Cron':

I liked it when your mother put her arms around me and kissed me .. My mother has never been a mother to me; I have had no mother. She is a brilliant wonderful little woman, all intellect and genius. The relation between us is a very curious one; it is I who have always had to think for, guide and nurse her since I was a tiny child. She seems to me like a very favourite brilliant child of mine!... (74)

Several of Olive's closest friends have noted that along with such maternal, caring qualities she possessed a child-like nature, part of her which demanded, instead of offered, love and attention. Havelock Ellis, her "old other-self" (75), with whom more than any other friend she was able to explore this side of herself, wrote after her death:

She possessed a nature that was fundamentally simple, strong, primitive, and passionate. It absorbed its food through its vivid sense organs, but it worked mainly within, creating the atmosphere of an imaginative dream-world. For all her keen vision of the external world she was rarely in quite accurate adjustment to that world. So it came about that while she possessed a more than feminine and emotional and maternal disposition, and at the same time a ruthless and penetrating intellect that was more than masculine in its power [again, those firm definitions of 'male' and 'female'], she was a child, a trustful, idealizing, imaginative, helpless child. I well recall Eleanor Marx .. turning towards her one day to say with an affectionate smile: 'What you need is a nursemaid' ... (76)

The voices of both abandoned child and protective mother echo throughout her letters to Ellis. (77) Just before her retreat from London society to the sanctuary of the convent at Harrow she writes despairingly,

I am so worn out I can't go on much longer. I must go and live at the convent where I can have kindly human beings near me. You don't know what it is to have a mother like yours that looks after you. Give my love to her. (78)

And again, three years later,

Oh, I've been so desolate all my life, Harry, I've never had a home, I've never had anyone to take care of me like other girls have. I was thrown out on the world when I was eleven, and even before that I hadn't a real home. (79)

We find this pathetic 'lost child' self-image repeated in her friendship with Carpenter. "I know you and feel to you as a little child does to its mother" she tells him from Mentone. (80) And, in dark days, "I have been clinging to you these last days as a little child clings to its mother ..." (81). In contrast to this she can also become mother to Ellis as baby:

Oh, my baby isn't coming, and I put on my clean blue dress and did my hair. I got some rumpsteak and I've just been out and got half a cold lovely water melon. I thought I'd feed a hot baby with it, but now he hasn't come. I shan't put on my clean blue dress tomorrow, and I shan't do my hair! Are you ill, 'heart - aar'? ['aar' - vein] (82)

Olive's establishment of a mother/child relationship with Ellis was doubtless partly to avoid facing up to the whole issue of her own sexuality. This role-play was also an enacting of her life-long wish to 'serve' others. We must remember that her first ambition in life was to enter the medical profession (again a passionate interest handed down by Rebecca). It was as a prospective nurse that she first came to Britain, only to discover that her precarious state of health could not stand up to the rigorous training at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. She writes of her brief experience of it to Ellis:

Yes, my little glimpse of nursing life was very sweet to me; I am glad I had it though it was so short. The dream of my life was to be a doctor: I can't remember a time when I was so small that it was not there in my heart. I used to dissect ostriches, and sheeps' hearts and livers, and almost the first book I ever bought myself was an elementary physiology. I don't like to talk of my old dream even now, my heart is still tender over it. It seems to me that a doctor's is the most perfect of all lives; it satisfies the craving to know, and also the craving to serve .. (83)

Four years later she is talking to Edward Carpenter of a midwifery course at the Endle Street Hospital in London, another means of satisfying her craving to know and serve, which we assume to have remained unfulfilled as it is never mentioned again:

I shall not be a common nurse there, you are to know, I shall be a real midwife licensed by the College of Physicians. I shall think no end of myself! I want to do some maternal work for a little time, and not think, and it is very beautiful to me to work with those mothers and little babies. (84)

Her distinction here between 'maternal work' and intellectual work - thinking and writing - is interesting. Often she sees maternity in terms of an alternative form of creativity which she links with her impulse to write, yet here there is a definite juxtaposition of the physical and mental. Surrogate motherhood provides a tempting way out of the obligation, as a writer, to think and therefore an escape from an essential part of her creative self. The whole aspect of service to others instead of self is taken one step further towards masochistic altruism in a long letter to Karl Pearson from the Convent, in July 1886. She writes of the importance of child-bearing as an intrinsic part of the ideal sexual partnership, and of the pleasure a woman gains "when she feels that by suffering [her emphasis] she is bringing something into another's life that he could not have had without it ..." (85)

In contrast to this image of martyred maternity she has written elsewhere, still rather reprovably, of the "selfish animal instinct" with which a mother loves her babies (86), and the strong physical urge in her to have a child remained something that even in her most self-denying moments she was unable to eradicate. "I have killed out everything now, I think, except the wish to have a child. That I shall never quite kill. I think it's bodily." (87) Writing to her friend Mrs. Cawood, she asks jealously,

How does your baby fare? Why have you got so many? I'm sure you don't need them all. And I would give just anything for one. I'm going to adopt a child as soon as ever I'm rich enough. (88)

Schreiner felt strongly that women's choices about children should be more open. Cronwright-Schreiner mentions in his biography of her how

Olive said to me once that every unmarried woman over thirty should, if she wished, be allowed to have a child without any disgrace. She said it was a necessity for the proper health of the bodily functions of woman, and that a woman had a right to have a child when she was old enough to know what she was doing. (89)

Yet Olive herself usually connected the prospect of child-bearing with marriage, albeit somewhat despondently: "I'm sometimes afraid that the desire to have a child weighs very heavily with me in making me willing to marry." (90) A year after writing that to Edward Carpenter the woman who had affirmed, "I am not a marrying woman, when it comes to the point my blood curdles", (91) had married her 'real man'.

Before examining Olive's relationship with Samuel Cronwright, the man to whom she finally decided to commit herself, I want to look at her intense involvement with Karl Pearson. I must emphasize here that I am drawing out aspects of their relationship which are pertinent to this discussion of Schreiner's sense of identity and gender. I cannot hope to explore the events of the mid-1880's, a crucial period of Schreiner's development, as stringently as First and Scott do in their biography where they discuss the operation and intrigues of the Men and Women's Club in fascinating detail, and delicately probe the paradoxes of Olive and Karl's friendship. (92) I should also mention here Betty McGinnis Fradkin's 'overview' of the Schreiner - Pearson - Cobb correspondence (93), a compilation of 298 letters made by Pearson's daughter, Helga Hacker, and now held in University College Library, London. Fradkin's is an interesting evaluation of this strange triangular relationship, though should, I think, be used in conjunction with a reading of the original



letters themselves for a more thorough understanding of Olive Schreiner's feelings and responses at the time.

Karl Pearson, a brilliant man of science and one of the leading eugenists of the period, seems temperamentally to have been the antithesis of those other important men in Olive's life, Ellis and Carpenter. Yet he fulfilled her notions of what a 'real man' should be: intellectual, ambitious, dominating and physically attractive to women. Olive was soon guarding him jealously.

From the Convent at Harrow in June 1886, she wrote to him warning against the dangers of marriage:

.. you must not marry. Whoever it was, she would drag you down. If she agreed to be married only for a year on trial as to whether it was good for you both, you would find that your moral feeling, i.e. your dread of inflicting suffering, would oblige you to stay with her even if she was suffocating you. It is that moral obligation, that dependency of another soul upon you that is so terrible in marriage.

The exclusive possession of a marriage partnership seems to have been a major preoccupation of Schreiner's at this time, as it was with many of her radical friends who, like Carpenter, were questioning the present inequality of such clinging, destructive unions between "half-grown" men and women who were either "serfs" or "parasites". (94) No doubt her doctor and friend, Bryan Donkin's, repeated proposals contributed to her feelings of pressure, the struggle to remain single and independent, however lonely and sexually frustrated. The strength of her feeling for Pearson must have complicated things further. In a letter to him, describing the possessiveness she regarded as an anathema to any close relationship between man and woman, she seems both to be reassuring him that such feelings will never spoil their friendship and convincing herself that such emotional dependence is indeed wrong:

When she [a woman] comes near to a man it comes at last, generally, to this - 'Will you love me' - that is 'Will you have no object or aim in the world but me. Let me be the little glass through which you see life. Let me be the wall around you beyond which you do not grow. You shall be all the world to me! (95)

Not surprisingly then, Schreiner's letters to Pearson contain a curious mixture of emotional involvement and detachment. She writes often as a disinterested colleague, his 'man-friend', "as a worker and not as a woman" (96), on matters of shared research and discussion, yet occasionally lapses into audacious provocation - the odd humorous remark, the bitingly witty retort - or a sudden cry of personal anguish. At one moment she is the teasing friend and confidante, mocking his academic pomposity, his "priggishness" (97), or his cool, hard masculinity, "of the consistency of stones, brick-bats and other persistently insensitive materials". (98) At another moment she is the ambitious, intellectual equal, idealistic and critical: "Sometimes I have thought I saw in you a little swerving from that following after the absolute truth, and it has cost me some pain." (99) There are pages of well-argued and analytical discussion on topics of sexuality, anthropology or literary theory, and other issues hotly debated at the Men and Women's Club.

Olive's love for Karl is thinly disguised amidst the swings of mood and personality changes in her letters to him. She often apologises for admissions of weakness or indiscretion. She occasionally makes herself vulnerable, opening up emotionally, pleading with him to visit her while in retreat at the Convent. ("I've never in my life humbled myself so before a man before!" (100)) She reveals how important he is to her in the odd, throw-away remark, frequently in self-deprecatory manner, as in this P.S. on the back of an envelope addressed to him: "Came out from the theatre this afternoon pressed under your elbow, but you have to look down such a long way to see me that I suppose I was invisible." (101)

Pearson himself must have been well aware of Olive's passion for him. Little is known about his feelings; his letters to her are not extant. First and Scott observe that although he wrote a cloyingly emotional poem

to commemorate Olive's death in 1920 (102), the image of him in the Men and Women's Club remained one of an undemonstrative man, formal in personal relations. Even as close a friend as Elizabeth Cobb could write of him, "He is more impersonal than anyone I know ... and seems as a rule absolutely without personal feeling." (103) His daughter, Helga Hacker, writing of his correspondence with his friend and former Secretary, H. G. Everton-Jones, notes how

he expressed his very great admiration for Olive, whom he considered to have had the greatest mind of any woman he had met. He discussed what should be a man's behaviour to a woman who has a sexual passion for him which he does not reciprocate. (104)

Olive had clearly set out her views on sex and friendship early on in their correspondence.

The most ideally perfect friendship between a man and a woman that I know of is one where the man, in addition to sympathy with the woman's whole intellectual nature, feels that she is to him also sexually perfect; without friendship such a feeling would disturb and bring intense bitterness and sorrow; with friendship the fact that such a feeling exists on one side only adds to the quiet beauty of the relationship ... That friendships are possible between men and women without the least sex feeling on either side I have proved over and over again - the only question I have ever asked myself has been - does 'sex attraction' kill friendship? I think not. (105)

Despite the underlined reassurance, the reasoned theory, Olive seemed deeply confused by her strong feelings for Karl Pearson. As First and Scott point out, "she needed to be treated, and to project herself, as intellectual rather than as woman; at the same time her ideology undermined the differentiation". For her "intellectual rapport was indistinguishable from emotional involvement". (106)

This growing confusion about her needs was set against internal tensions within the Club surrounding the Hinton bigamy trial in October 1886. (107) That, coupled with Pearson's close relationship with Elizabeth Cobb, an old friend and patron of his, which Olive found peculiarly

threatening, led to a severe emotional breakdown. Donkin, her ever-sensitive doctor, reported to Pearson that she seemed "utterly smashed" and made a pertinent point in his own summary of her precarious condition: "We are many of us men, and you I think especially, given to being too rational in our judgement of others - and we don't pin enough might to the influence of emotions." (108)

Olive, in vociferously denying her 'sex-love' for Pearson, had in fact offered herself completely to him, using a powerful metaphor which encapsulated vividly her repressed sexuality: "If I could I would open a vein in my arm and let all my blood run into your body to strengthen you for your work. Your work is mine." (109) She had demanded that Pearson 'crush' any element of sex evident in her feeling for him:

See, I love you better than anything else in the world; and I have tried to keep far from you that nothing material might creep in between my brain and yours; and you have not understood me. (110)

To be misunderstood, wrongly interpreted, caused Olive great pain; what is perhaps even more painful is her refusal to understand herself and to acknowledge and come to terms with her sexuality, demanding instead that this part of her be recognized and stamped out by a man. First and Scott sum up succinctly Olive's reaction to this type of situation, a recurring one, in her life:

Her impulse was to withdraw from any relationship less than ideal, for it meant her disinterestedness had failed her. The moral obsessions of her missionary background became fused with an identification with others, even when they involved her denial or sacrifice of herself. Her instinct now was to flee. (111)

Several months later Olive wrote to Ellis from Switzerland, still agonizing over her relationship with Pearson:

With regard to Karl my feeling is one of sharp pain that he should have misunderstood me so, both about Mrs. Cobb and my feeling. I thought he was the one man who would understand me, between whom and me there could be love and friendship without any sex element.

She goes on to reinforce this now familiar denial:

All that my sexual nature had to give I gave years ago, and it is agony now when men call on me for what my nature has not to give .. I've loved Karl better than anyone else in the world ever since I was at Portsea Place but it's just the absence of sex feeling that has drawn me. I can't bear sexual relationships any more even in a kiss. I have tried hard to feel sexual to you and Donkin and you don't know how it sometimes hurts me ..

Loving Karl as I do, I have never once had a feeling that I wished to kiss him .. Now I've got away from the agonising pressure I feel like a thing that got out of a net that was just going to kill it. (112)

A final P.S. denies any sexual relationship between Pearson and Elizabeth Cobb, hotly proclaiming, "The kind of love he makes women feel for him is like that of Dante for Beatrice." How much conviction, how much self-deception lies behind such statements of romantic idealism? Again Schreiner's confusion can be seen as that of a struggling feminist of her time. She retreats into the safety of a strongly-enforced cultural concept of male / female relationships, trying to convince herself of the still seductive notion of what Rachel Blau DuPlessis has called "romantic thralldom", "an all-encompassing, totally defining love between apparent unequals." (113) By evoking Dante and Beatrice, Schreiner enters a world of idealized, romanticized love which "insists upon the differences between the sexes or partners, encouraging a sense of mystery surrounding the motives and powers of the lover." (114)

In spite of her political aspirations for equality in relationships, Schreiner frequently seemed confused about the place of sexuality in within such partnerships. She had observed years before, writing to Ellis that:

when passion enters into a relationship it does spoil the holy sweetness. But perhaps those

people are right who say no such thing as  
friendship is possible between a man and a woman,  
only I can't bear to think so. (115)

Despite her frequent doubts about the possibility of long-term sexual relationships involving both friendship and passion, Olive often spoke and wrote of the prospect of marriage. When the idea wasn't 'curdling her blood' and she saw it as an inevitable step forward in her personal life, she seems to have had a fairly clear idea of the kind of man her husband would be. Discussing a mutual friend, Bob Muirhead, with Carpenter who saw him as a prospective partner for her, and to whom she was indeed greatly attracted (116), Olive insists he is

too good. If I marry it'll be the type of man  
most removed from our friend Bob, a man compared  
to whom I shall be a saint!!! A sort of small  
Napoleon! I don't know why it is those natures  
always draw me. Not the man of thought and fine  
drawn feeling like Bob and Ellis and Karl Pearson,  
intensely as I love them; but the wish to marry  
comes towards the man of action ... (117)  
(cont. on next page)

Samuel 'Cron' Cronwright, the strong, handsome, sunburnt ostrich farmer who managed the farm next to her old friends, the Cawoods of Ganna Hoek, captured her attention three years after her return to South Africa in 1889. He in turn was captivated. He had been a passionate admirer of The Story of an African Farm for several years, and was also a free thinker. But it is in his sheer physicality that Olive delights in her letters to friends back in England:

Cron's very nice and uncivilized. When he came to see me he came very properly dressed, high collar, white shirt, tie, a very handsome young man. As we sat talking in the sun before my door, he suddenly unbuttoned his collar and threw it off without a word. In a few moments off went his necktie; then he took off his coat! Then his waistcoat! Then he rolled up his shirt sleeves! Then he leaned back in the chair and drew a great sigh, as much as to say, 'Thank God!' and folded his arms, blissfully happy. It's really a great bond between us that we have such a horror of clothes. I could never have married anyone who believed that clothes were people. (118)

She admired the uncomplicated earthiness of this Lawrentian figure:

He has a very strong nature, very simple, very direct; with a very clear reason .. He is intensely passionate and intense, but with immense powers of controlling himself. He has not my complex intuitive nature .. (119)

Despite her feelings of superiority in sensitivity and fine intellect, she quickly began to rely on his powers of 'control' to direct herself. Not surprisingly, the desire to marry precipitated much inner conflict. Almost ten years previously she had written to Ellis,

when I find a man as much stronger than I am as I am [stronger] than a child, then I will marry him, no one before. I do not mean physically strong, I mean mentally, morally, emotionally, practically. I do not think there is such a man. (120)

She believed that in Cron she had found him, and she looked to him, as a child to an adult, to make the decision:

I have not the strength to walk. Cron, will you think it all out with that brain of yours so clear and strong, and tonight when we are in the train explain to me just what is right ... Oh Cron, with that clear moral sense, with

that direct sight of yours, lead your little Olive ...  
Where another soul is concerned such a terrible doubt  
comes on me .. Can I trust you to find the ideally  
right path and lead me in it. (121)

The chosen path of coupledness did seem at first to be 'ideally right'. Olive joyously summed up her feelings of love as "the most curious and complete 'now' when I'm with him," (122) and this, for a while after their marriage, seemed to develop and mellow into a deeper understanding and shared happiness.

However, circumstances at that particularly troubled time in South Africa were in so many ways against them. Their involvement in Cape Town politics \* after the notorious Jameson Raid of 1896, which destroyed the last vestiges of admiration Olive had felt for Rhodes, was intense and demanding of both of them, necessitating periods of separation which had already become a feature of their married life due to Olive's continuing bouts of ill-health. The birth, on 30 April 1895, and inexplicable death a day later of her first and only child, a seemingly healthy baby girl, must have caused the couple immense grief, only hinted at by Olive in later correspondence.

It is difficult not to feel biased against Cronwright in assessing the difficulties of their relationship. Problematic as Olive must have been to live with, he comes across as a peculiarly pompous and unlikeable man. His biography of her tells us more about his own character rather than provide an honest or perceptive portrait of Schreiner herself. D.R. Beeton is surely right when he suggests that Cronwright was both "Mesmerized by the brilliant mind of the genius who accepted him" and "tired of the woman who disappointed him". (123) He gave up farming to allow Schreiner to complete her work of the moment, The Buddhist Priest's Wife - then planned as a novel - and From Man to Man, within an agreed

\* The intricacies of Schreiner's involvement have been admirably charted by First and Scott (see chapters 5 and 6 of their biography). They examine how her marginalization as a white female writer / politician was affected and increased by her move from a pro-Boer, anti-British stance towards a later espousal of Black liberation, and they highlight the connections between her pacifism, anti-racism and anti-sexism.



period in a favourable environment, which of course remained an impossible dream. "I did not know her so well then as I did later, her impracticality, her inability really to work ..." (124) Did he ever really know or understand his restless, brilliant, idealistic, confused wife? The pages of the Life are full, alternately, of "an obtuse kind of resentment" (D. R. Beeton) of a difficult woman, or uncritical and naive praise for an eccentric genius. The bulk of it makes laboured reading, and seldom is the true spirit of Schreiner revealed.

A nephew, G. M. C. Cronwright, remembers his Uncle Cron as "humourless, rigid and assertive".

He never took me upon his knee or told me stories - though occasionally he would read me in a deliberate monotone passages of great verse from the great poets. He insisted that verse should so be read. 'You must not try to put your feeling into it' he said." (125)

From Cronwright and the rest of his family the boy had a limited picture of his famous aunt: "that she was a great authoress, that she was a genius, that she had asthma, kept meerkats and .. was a strange, uncontrolled and uncontrollable creature." (126)

In spite of their conflicting temperaments, though, Cron and Olive did succeed, to some extent, in courageously putting their idealistic theories about equality and independence into practice in their own partnership. The small but significant fact of Cron's adopting his wife's name was often picked up derisively by hecklers at political gatherings, and he spiritedly defended this public acknowledgement of sexual freedom. Patricia Meyer Spacks has noted that "in exercising a Victorian woman's only important choice - of whom, or whether, to marry" the New Women of the time were risking "the integrity of inward vitality". (127) Both Cron and Olive were aware that her 'inward vitality' depended on her ability to write and to keep writing, which in turn depended on her state of health. It is perhaps

indicative of the ambivalence Schreiner continued to feel about the political implications and emotional encroachment of marriage - notwithstanding the relatively open nature of their partnership - that her asthmatic restlessness grew more acute rather than stabilized or improved at this point in her life. She was still torn between the need to write and to retain an independent career, and her need to fulfil the role of wife. Liz Stanley has put forward a strong case for suggesting that Olive's asthma was not linked so much to place or to her childhood development and difficult relationship with her mother, as Cronwright-Schreiner and others (notably Friedmann) have argued, but that it was rather "the product of material conditions she was currently experiencing, and experiencing in relation to men". (128) Cron's exacting demands, his domineering approach to her work and intolerance of her times of despair and lassitude must have contributed to their living apart for longer and longer periods.

If Olive's relationships with men were frequently hampered or cut short by an intrusive element of 'passion' on either side, or, as in the case of her marriage to Cron, to have broken under the strain of her passionate commitment to writing, her female friendships seem, in contrast, to have been relatively calm and enduring. One close friend, Adela Smith (nee Villiers, niece of Sir Henry Loch, governor of the Cape Colony) spoke highly, as did almost all women who came into contact with Olive, of her inspiring, uplifting feminism:

Olive always said she envied men and would rather have been a man than a woman; nevertheless she was the first who woke in me the knowledge of the glory of womanhood, which has never since left me. She showed me the force and power possible to women ... (129)

Olive frequently invokes the strength of sisterhood when talking of her writing and its aims to bring women together through a shared understanding of their sexual roles and identities, as in this letter to her friend Mrs. J.H. Philpot:

I wish I was large and strong and could put my arms round all the tired lonely women in the world and help them. The work of my life is to try and teach women to love one another. If we could leave off quarrelling with men and just love and hold each other's hands all would come right. Oh, I love the two women in my book so. [Rebekah and Bertie in From Man to Man] I am getting to love women more and more. I love men too, so very much - only they don't need me. (130)  
(cont. on next page)

Again, that strong desire to serve, to be 'needed' - a longing that was fulfilled in her intense relationship with Eleanor Marx. The two women met early on during Olive's first period in London, and Havelock Ellis was soon to describe Eleanor as "probably the nearest of Olive's new women friends in London". (131)

Defined at the age of seventeen by her mother as political from top to toe, (132) Eleanor devoted her life to socialism with tireless enthusiasm and dedication. Her father and his close friend, Engels, were the most influential figures in her childhood and adolescence; in adulthood she flung herself into relentless political activity, taking at the same time a lively interest in contemporary drama and literature and becoming involved in the heady social life of the radical London set. Ellis described her fondly as "a vigorous and radiant personality", (133) and for Olive she was "like mental champagne". (134) The two passionate, idealistic women found much in common.

The one stumbling block in their relationship was Olive's hatred - it is not too strong a word - of Edward Aveling, Eleanor's lover, whom she eventually 'married' in an unofficial, free yet public union<sup>a</sup>. He was to prove a source of anxiety and great distress for Eleanor through his calousness and unthinking cruelty, his promiscuity and financial foolhardiness. Olive wrote to Ellis in May 1884:

I want to tell you what my feeling is about woman, but I can't tonight because I would have too much to say. I have just got a letter I should like to show you. It is from a woman whose heart is being broken; and the man who is doing it doesn't know and doesn't realise what he is doing. Why can't we men and women come near each other, and help each other, and not kill each other's souls and blight each other's lives? There is no need why it should be so. (135)

The woman was Eleanor, the man Aveling. Olive's instinctive recoiling from him seems to have been shared by many who knew the couple, yet her feelings

<sup>a</sup> Aveling already had, in fact, a legal wife from whom he had been separated for some years.

are characteristically spontaneous and acute:

I am beginning to have such a horror of Dr. A. To say I dislike him doesn't express it at all. I have a fear and horror of him when I am near. Every time I see him this shrinking grows stronger ... I love her, but he makes me so unhappy. He is so selfish, but that doesn't account for the feeling of dread ... I fought it down for Eleanor's sake, but here it is, stronger than ever. (136)

Eleanor's biographer, Yvonne Kapp, sees this loathing as "disproportionate to her apparently casual acquaintance with this life-diminishing character". Indeed, Kapp reacts in similarly biased vein to Schreiner herself, accusing "this dumpy little woman" of a "rampant egotism", as being "possessive and domineering in her friendships", and states categorically that she "preferred women" to men. The effect on Eleanor of this tyrannical harpy was, notes Kapp reprovingly, "not bracing". She "captivated", almost "captured" her. (137) This does not grant poor Eleanor much strength of character, nor does it take into consideration the complexity of Olive's personality - the insecurities, the need to give and be given, the warmth and generosity which she found echoed in 'Tussy's' temperament.

Kapp uses a long letter from Eleanor to Olive (little else of their correspondence exists, unfortunately) to back up this character assassination. It is quoted by Ellis in his Adelphi article on Eleanor, and also at some length by First and Scott, yet it seems worthwhile here to pick out a few sections which illustrate the empathy that existed between the two women.

My Olive, I wonder if I bore you with my stupid letters - as I wonder if, one of these days, you will get horribly tired of me altogether. This is no 'figure of speech'. I really do wonder, or rather fear. I have such a terror of losing your love. I have such a strong feeling, borne of a pretty large experience, that to care overmuch for a thing is to make sure of losing it. I think of you, and one or two other real friends, in an agony of fear and doubt. Silly perhaps, but so it is, and I can't pretend to you to be better, or stronger, than I am. I keep wanting to hear you say you love me just a little. You do not know, Olive, how my whole nature craves for love ...

I am alone, and while in some sense I am relieved to be alone, it is also very terrible; I can't help thinking and remembering, and then the solitude is more than I can bear. I would give anything just now to be near you. You always help and give me rest - and I am so tired, Olive. The constant strain of appearing the same when nothing is the same, the constant effort not to break down, sometimes becomes intolerable ...

It is too bad of me to go on scribbling like this. But you would forgive me if you knew the help it is to me. Writing to you I seem to see your dear face before me and that gives me courage and strength. Write me a line in case I do not see you tomorrow or next day. Just one line - say you love me. That will be such a joy, it will help me get through the long miserable days, and longer, more miserable nights, with less heavy a heart ... That you care for me is one of those mysteries that remain for ever inexplicable.

Good night, little girl. All good be with you ever -  
Your Eleanor (139)

This is clearly Eleanor at her lowest ebb, vulnerable and desperate, isolated in her anguish as Olive so often was, a strong woman deeply devoted to a political life, torn apart by the conflicting dependencies of her personal relationships and the peculiarly Victorian predicament of 'appearing the same when nothing is the same'. Her suicide, thirteen years later, was the final point in a series of breakdowns and periods of depression caused not only by coping with her mother's terminal illness and her turbulent relationship with Aveling, but also her inability, as she saw it, to carry through the work of her father in the face of a drift away from Marxism within the British working-class movement. "She believed she was no longer needed by anyone or anything." (Kapp.)

Yvonne Kapp seems somewhat embarrassed by the "over-charged emotional language" of that honest, painful declaration of love and affection to Olive. Something in Olive's "overpowering personality" had clearly "reduced Eleanor to pulp", she concludes briskly, and dismisses the whole thing as "an incontinent love letter". (139)

Whether their love had sexual overtones is never made explicit by either woman, although we know from Olive's correspondence with Ellis that

they discussed aspects of sexuality and compared their feelings during menstruation with frank interest. Biographers' constant fretting over Olive's latent lesbianism seems unnecessarily probing, yet it is undoubtedly curious that, surrounded as she was by personal exploration of male homosexuality, she never questioned her passion for female friends on that level. She certainly regarded intimacy between women with much respect and tenderness, as is evident in this letter to Mrs. Frances Smith:

My other two friends (Miss Molteno and Miss Alice Greene) are two splendored women who have lived together for about 17 years and who are so closely united that I can never think of them apart, but as parts of one whole. They are both so noble and beautiful, each in her own way ...

You say that children are 'the only excuse for marriage', but I think quite otherwise. I think a close union with some human creature, permanent, bearing on all parts of the daily life and with the element of excitement and change eliminated from it as much as possible, is in itself a primary necessity in all fully developed natures. This union may exist between a parent and child ... or between a brother and sister or two friends of the same sex as in the case of my friends Miss Molteno and Miss Greene; the element of sex and above all the element of physical sexual union is not necessary to it. (140)

Joyce Avrech Berkman, in her study of Schreiner, anticipates the response to this letter from today's feminist reader as being one of amusement at "Schreiner's innocence" but at the same time sharing her "appreciation of the two women's intimacy". (141) Berkman remarks how such a reader would be aware that most Victorian women were doomed to unfulfilling erotic and emotional relationships due to the stereotyping and inequality "in gender power and status" of the times. "The heterosexual erotic and psychic ambience of Victorians was frequently unavoidably sado-masochistic." (A salient point in considering Schreiner's own experiences and tendencies.) "The sensitive Victorian woman", she concludes, "could well anticipate a more genuine intimacy with someone of her own sex in which sexual politics so prevalent in heterosexuality could, perhaps, be avoided". (142) I would dispute none of this, but would argue that Schreiner herself was not

always able to 'avoid' the tensions and complexities of sexual politics in her friendships with women, and was not, perhaps, quite so 'innocent' as Berkman and others are ready to assume.

However, her only mention of confronting lesbian feelings within herself is in connection with Ellis' sister Louie, of whom she was very fond. "When she put her arm round me on the sofa I wanted to cuddle close up to her, but I was ashamed. I liked it. I have such an odd feeling for her." (143) Perhaps her silence on the matter is indicative of unconscious repression of this aspect of her sexuality, a blocked fear of such 'oddness'.

If Olive sought freedom, sexual freedom, by denying her sexuality and by refusing to be considered as a sexually alive woman, she also sought it through a stubborn dissociation at times from the female sex. She exalted sisterhood and yet often seemed to find the women around her repellent, alien beings, predatory and prone to pettiness. "It's not men that trouble one", she wrote caustically to Carpenter, "it's middle-class women that one tries so hard to understand and reconcile with a good God. I believe it can be done though!!!" (144) She struggled with her feelings of persecution and hostility, yet in times of emotional stress and self-doubt seems unable to overcome them:

Oh, it is awful to be a woman. These women are killing me. Give my love to Louie, but I don't want to see her or any other woman. I want to live alone, alone, alone. I don't say the fault is not in myself, but they are doing it all the same ... I wonder if I shall ever come back to England among these women again ... Oh, please see that they bury me in a place where there are no women. I've not been a woman really, though I've seemed like one. (to Ellis, 1888) (145)

The paradox is that Schreiner, more than most women, was aware of that constant pressure to 'seem like one'. She raged against the gossips, the flirts, the society ladies who mocked her appearance in foreign hotels, the narrow-minded landladies who invaded the privacy of her independent



life-style, but she understood them. She could see why women played these enforced roles, entered willingly into the cloistered, fraudulent world of womanhood. Was the price she paid for her perceptiveness, her detachment, her rejection of all this too high? She doubts herself, her chosen life, so often - "I don't say the fault is not in myself". She turns the sense of persecution inwards.

Writing to Mrs. Francis Smith of her protective feelings for a baby girl - "because of all the anguish which may be before it", she talks of her awareness of the female predicament as having been with her from an early age:

~~You know when I was a young girl and a child I felt this awful bitterness in my soul because I was a woman, because there were women in the world. I felt [like] the wonderful Kaffir woman, who once was talking to me and said, 'There may be a God, I do not say there is not; but if there is he is not good - why did he make woman?' During those ten or twelve happy middle years of my life the bitterness went; I realised the evils of woman's position but I was so full of infinite hope ... Now .. I seem struggling with more than the old bitterness; it seems choking me, suffocating me sometimes. I try to fix my eye on the future but the future seems so far ... (146)~~

Schreiner channelled that bitterness, that struggle and hope into her writing, trying in her novels to fully explore 'the evils of woman's position' and in her dreams and allegories to envisage a future of freedom. How does she tackle the obstacles of sex and gender here in her work? Do they remain to choke and suffocate her characters? Schreiner felt empowered by her writing when fully involved in the creative process; within it she could feel sure of herself: "I don't wish I was a little child now. I'm a big woman. I feel very happy today. I'm working ..." (147) So how do her fictional women and men define and explore themselves?

CHAPTER III NEW WOMAN, NEW MAN?:

STEREOTYPES AND SELF-IMAGE

2. THE WRITINGS

In Woman and Labour Schreiner wrote:

the unrest and suffering peculiar to our age is caused by conflict going on within the individual himself. So intensely rapid is the change which is taking place in our environment and knowledge that in the course of a single life a man may pass through half a dozen phases of growth ... Within the individuality itself of such persons, goes on, in an intensified form, that very struggle, conflict, and disco-ordination which is going on in society at large between its different members and sections; and agonising moments must arise, when the individual, seeing the necessity for adopting new courses of action, or for accepting new truths, or conforming to new conditions, will yet be tortured by the hold of traditional convictions; and the man or woman who attempts to adapt their life to the new material conditions and to harmony with the new knowledge is almost bound at some time to rupture the continuity of their own psychological existence. (1)

This is strong language: 'struggle', 'conflict', 'agonising', 'tortured', 'rupture'. It is this painful breaking away, this pioneering exploration of self within society that forms the very essence and strength of Schreiner's fictional characters. Her women and men live out the Woman Question in their own lives. As Ehrenreich and English put it,

the Woman Question was a matter of immediate personal experience: the consciousness of possibilities counterpoised against prohibitions, opportunities against ancient obligations, instincts against external necessities. (2)

Schreiner released the tension and conflict of her own personal experience through imaginative writing, and she saw that as the best way of reaching out to others. She felt that the social friction and human suffering of the times was 'so subtle' and 'almost incalculable' that it was impossible 'adequately to portray it in dry didactic language'. It was only 'truly describable in the medium of art, where actual concrete

individuals are shown acting and reacting on each other - as in the novel or the drama'. (3) In this chapter I shall look at how her individuals 'act and react' on each other and on us as readers, and how she portrays that daring 'rupturing' of their psychological existence.

Schreiner was keenly aware that social 'disco-ordination' was felt at all levels of human life, political, religious and domestic, and her characters' identities spring directly from experience of these different planes of being. But, as we see from her correspondence, for Schreiner the core of all conflict could be found in sexuality, 'because when we enter the region of sex we touch, as it were, the spinal cord of human existence, its great nerve centre, where sensation is most acute, and pain and pleasure most keenly felt'. (4) In her novels and allegories, then, it is within the limits of femininity or masculinity her characters move and define themselves, or from which they struggle to break free to explore new, fuller possibilities for self-expression.

Schreiner was convinced that such personal, sexual re-evaluation was a vital step towards resolving social imbalance and discord. Laurens van der Post, speaking from a knowledge of the 'machismo' inherent in a colonial society, has written that "the deep rejection of woman in our man's world proceeds directly from the failure of man to honour the woman in himself". (5) Similarly the novelist Ian MacEwan has asked urgently in this present epoch of global power-seeking, "Shall there be womanly times, or shall we die?" (6) Schreiner's was also a vision of the potential interdependence of the sexes; she demanded a plasticity, an openness in sexual relationships and self-expression.

Undine, Lyndall and Rebekah challenge the structures of a man-made society by being 'unwomanly'. Schreiner's depiction of sexual role-playing

and reversal of conventional sexual conduct in all three novels raises questions about the nature of maleness and femaleness. Yet as always with Schreiner, there remains much ambivalence; the answers to such questions seem frequently as muddled and as complex as her own responses to her sexual identity. The 'dry didactic' argument of Woman and Labour rings forth with Biblical clarity, its exposition of social structures and sex roles owing much to the external influences of Darwinism and eugenics. The imaginative writings are more personal and more confused, the portrayal of Undine's masochism, Gregory Rose's transvestism, Rebekah's self-sacrifice serving to perplex and provoke.

Being a 'new pathfinder', (7) as Schreiner expressed it in Woman and Labour, inevitably entailed suffering, alienation. Her heroines stumble uneasily between the old and the new order of things.

It is the swimmer who first leaps into the frozen stream who is cut sharpest by the ice; those who follow him find it broken, and the last find it gone. It is the man or woman who first treads down the path which the bulk of humanity will ultimately follow, who must find themselves at last in solitudes where the silence is deadly. (8)

Grim words. In Woman and Labour this mission, assigned to the 'most advanced individual of our societies', is depicted with messianic fervour; in the novels it is sensitively humanized, expressed through the complexities and fallibilities of the individual identity.

The loneliness of the New Woman is a recurring theme in all the work, and nowhere is more starkly depicted than in the short allegories Schreiner draws together to form her 'Three Dreams in a Desert'. (9) "I am utterly alone!" cries the woman who must ford the deep river to the Land of Freedom, stripped of her 'mantle of Ancient-received-opinions' and her 'shoes of dependence'. She must detach herself from all former relationships, symbolised by the life-sucking figure of Love, a tiny child pressed to her breast whose only uttered word has been 'Passion'. "I have dreamed he

might learn to say 'Friendship' in that land." The old man, Reason, urges the woman to leave the child, to cast aside that self-sacrificing part of her. In the relationship with him, nurtured by and possessive of her, lies her own destruction. "When you are in the water you will forget to fight, you will think only of him." The child will fly alone to the Land of Freedom where he, like the woman, will have matured. "He will be a man then, not a child. In your breast he cannot thrive; put him down that he may grow".

Similarly the two figures, in the first dream, of Man standing and Woman lying, bound together in the desert sand, Henry Moore-like statues of humanity in the still emptiness of the Karroo, must struggle to free themselves independently of the other. Once free and equal to her mate in ages long past, the woman was taken over by the Age-of-dominion-of-muscular-force: "when she stooped low to give suck to her young, and her back was broad, he put his burden of subjection on to it, and tied it on with the broad band of Inevitable Necessity." In her eyes the dreamer sees "the terrible patience of the centuries; the ground was wet with her tears, and her nostrils blew up the sand". The male standing beside this pitiful, animal-like figure of female subjection, is similarly helpless. He doesn't know why he cannot move.

With the approach of the 'Age-of-nervous force' who destroys the dominating 'Age-of-muscular-force' the band of Inevitable Necessity is broken by his Knife of 'Mechanical Invention'. The woman is free to rise. As she realises this 'a light came into her eyes, like when a sunbeam breaks into a dark room'. Her struggle to get up is painfully difficult, so long has she remained pressed to the sand, trapped and helpless. The dreamer demands indignantly that 'he who stands beside her will help her', but the old man Reason replies, "He cannot help her: she must help herself."

Let her struggle till she is strong." The male, in fact, is seen to hinder her upward movement, tightening the rope between them as he moves away and dragging her down. As she moves she also hurts him; the struggle must be one of mutual understanding and co-operation, a literal 'give and take'. "Let her once stagger on to her knees. In that day he will stand close to her, and look into her eyes with sympathy."

This allegorical scene encapsulates the movement of Schreiner's heroines, the New Woman's falling back from and struggling up towards self-definition. She is surrounded by other characters who contribute to the tightening of the rope in different ways: women who in their very 'womanliness'—their life of servitude of seeming, of sex-parasitism—serve to highlight her difference and increase her sense of alienation, and men who in their blinkered maleness continue to dominate, possess and enslave her. Then there are the border-line cases, the androgynous personalities of Henry Blair, Gregory Rose and Veronica Grey, who with their ambiguous sexuality seem to represent other, unexplored, possibilities of sexual expression. They are all depicted by Schreiner with a curious blend of derision and fascination. It is with the portrayal of these characters that she touches, perhaps almost unconsciously, on areas of gender and sexuality which in her personal life she never fully analysed.

I am writing such a funny, that is to say singular, scene. I don't know how it came into my head, where Veronica goes to look at a man's clothes. It is in the place of a whole condensed chapter. (10)

It is interesting that this 'singular' scene seems to have come to Schreiner almost intuitively, just as the Prelude of the novel, which she felt to be a very 'real' piece of writing 'about myself' rather than a 'made-up thing', (11) 'flashed' upon her. "My mind must have been working at it unconsciously, though I knew nothing of it - otherwise how did it come?" (12) Veronica's very sensual attraction to John-Ferdinand's

clothes is certainly expressive of Olive's own feelings. Dress reform was for her a small, but important, step towards women's liberation. At the same time it was more for her than logical feminist theory; it expressed a need to develop the more masculine aspects of her personality.

I want to wear boy's clothes and will as soon as I can get other women to join me. Boy's knicker-bockers, but not coats, I think they are ugly. A kind of blouse reaching to the knee ... (13)

Significantly she urged the ultra-feminine and girlish Louie Ellis, for whom she felt that 'odd' and shameful attraction to also adopt more masculine, free garments. (14)

Veronica's curiosity seems, in part, prompted by a sense of the male as Other, an alien being.

It was the first time she had ever stood alone in a man's bedroom. Her father had died in her early childhood and her brother was grown up and had gone to China before she could well remember, and in the quiet home in the South of London, where her widowed mother and four unmarried sisters lived, no men visitors had ever come. (15)

She could easily be pigeon-holed neatly as the typical Victorian spinster, plain, pious and sexually naive: "She rubbed her cheek gently against the shoulder of the coat. So a man's shoulder felt when you put your face against it". Schreiner does emphasize this in her character, the sexual repression and frustration, along with the spiteful competitiveness and hypocritical piety. She clearly meant her readers to dislike Veronica, as she did with Mrs. Drummond. When the two women get together in chapter six the petty meanness of their personalities is mutually reinforced.

But Veronica Grey cannot be so conveniently dismissed. From the first mention of her arrival at Thorn Kloof she is seen as slightly mysterious, an unknown quantity, "a lady from England, who was delicate and recommended to their care by their English relatives; but no one knew much of her or could tell what she would be like". (16) Again we

could expect a Victorian stereotype, the invalid gentlewoman, abroad for her health's sake. However, the detailed picture we are presented with does not accord with any such portrait or suffering spinsterhood. It is worth quoting in full, as we see the androgynous newcomer contrasted with the feminine Baby Bertie:

As they came nearer the house they saw Bertie standing on the top kitchen doorstep, and beside her a tall woman with square shoulders, dressed in a starched mauve cotton dress, with white collar and cuffs. Bertie, in her white muslin and blue ribbons, was motioning with her right hand, evidently pointing out to the stranger the interesting points in the landscape from the wagon house and pig sty to the great dam and the road over the nek, which could all be seen to advantage from the top of the steps. As they approached the steps, Bertie and the newcomer came down to meet them: She had light hair of an almost drab shade touched with yellow and parted down the centre. It was brushed smoothly down on each side, showing strikingly the large, flat-topped, broad shape of the head. Her forehead was high and arched in the middle; and her large eyebrows were even more arched, so that between them and the pale blue eyes below, over which the eyelids habitually drooped, almost the whole bulb of the eyeball showed under its eyelid. Her eyelashes were thick and almost white, and drooped over her cheeks readily as she looked down. She walked towards them with a long, even stride that contrasted with Bertie's wavering uneven little footsteps.

She held out a large, flat, cool hand to Rebekah and John-Ferdinand when Bertie introduced her.

It was not easy to say what her age was; it might have been anything between twenty-eight and thirty-eight; the perfect placidity of her face might make her appear older than she was, or, being old, might make her appear younger. (17)

This detailed description of Veronica's appearance is used by Schreiner apparently to encourage the reader's dislike of her as a character. Her 'mannish' largeness, her cool drabness, is contrasted with Bertie's beribboned femininity, her 'wavering uneven little footsteps'. (Interestingly, Bertie's obvious femaleness, her pretty helplessness, is also a target for Schreiner's scorn here.) Yet offsetting those masculine signs - the broad head, pronounced brow, large hands and confident stride - are marks of the cultured female, the drooping eyelashes, the 'perfect



placidity' of her face. In Veronica's androgyny, that ambiguous sexuality (her 'Grey'-ness?), there is an almost sinister magnetism. Rebekah, small, delicate, and already a wife and mother, puzzles over her attraction for the other members of the family: "Wherein lies this woman's charm?":

She looked at the angular high shoulders, at the rather large mouth, somewhat drawn down at the corners as in a fixed half smile; at the thickened finger-tips on the large, flat, snow white hands; and at the white eyelashes - and found no immediate answer. (18)

Although ~~not expressed directly by Schreiner~~, we feel Rebekah's antipathy springs from the fact that she is now a visitor to the family home as a married woman with her own domestic responsibilities and family duties, and Veronica has, in a sense, ~~usurped her place~~. Now it is she who provides ~~an interested ear for the father's agricultural discussion~~, although "she did not know a mielie land from a wheat field, or a bed of sweet-potatoes from one of pumpkins", in contrast to Rebekah's own active interest in the environment and all growing things. It is Veronica who becomes the 'little mother's' bedside companion, during her many periods of 'female' illness, and in turn she becomes for the maternal Bertie "something new to take care of", sleeping next door to her in Rebekah's old room.

While Rebekah expresses her hostility to the newcomer by quietly ignoring her, the Bushman girl Griet - excitable, anarchic, surely a child after Olive's own heart - is actively antagonistic. Her childish, mischievous vitality contrasts strongly with her enemy's coolly adult 'perfect placidity'. Indeed, in these first few chapters of her 'womanly' novel, Schreiner subtly weaves together different strands of womanhood, from the child's receptive innocence to the guarded complexity of the adult world, and all the elements of the Victorian female experience are here: the mother, the carer, the invalid, the angel, the child-woman. From this

the fabric of Rebekah's own search for identity is woven.

Schreiner creates a tension between the characters of Rebekah and Veronica while never actually bringing them together in conversation, and through this tension develops levels of femaleness which run throughout the novel. Rebekah wonders at Veronica's popularity, finding her masculine appearance unappealing; Veronica gossips to Mrs. Drummond about Rebekah's 'mannish ways' but admits she prefers Rebekah to Bertie, "though she was so strange, and not always very nice and womanly in her ways". (19) Conversely, Bertie for her is too female in her physical attractiveness; for women like Veronica and Mrs. Drummond Bertie's beauty always signals danger and competition. Together they later bring about Bertie's flight from the predatory society life of suburbia.

Mrs. Drummond also looks askance at Veronica's lack of charm. "She said one wondered how some women ever got married at all." Schreiner captures beautifully the spite and artificiality of this scene between the two women, physically and temperamentally unlike, but united in their attack on the two sisters. Mrs. Drummond's mannerisms, coy and venomous, are scathingly observed:

[She] drew her upper lip up sharply and held her head a little more on a side. She said some people couldn't help attracting men's attention; and she looked very sideways with her eyes at Veronica's square shoulders and the flat foot showing below her plain skirt. (20)

That meaningful sideways look sums up the dishonest subterfuge of the world the women inhabit, a world in which the openness of Rebekah and Bertie can have no place. We are reminded of Griet's nick-name for Veronica, 'thin-eyes', and remember how in John-Ferdinand's bedroom she finds the photograph of Bertie as a child, all dimples, curls and innocence, and as she examines it "her eyes contracted slowly at the inner corners". (Later Rebekah is to remark how Mrs. Drummond looked at her

with "little contractions in the inner corner of her eye that come to some women when they look at another whom they hate." (21))

Veronica's sudden act of violence in that 'singular' scene (22) is shocking, and all the more so for being deliberate, restrained, neatly executed. With "her large flat thumb on the face" in the photograph she cracks it "into a hundred fine little splinters". The moment seems symbolic of all the pain Bertie is to suffer at the hands of women like Veronica; ~~a picture is destroyed, and so is Bertie's image in society to be irreparably damaged. As a 'fallen woman' she is seen as a spoiled artefact, damaged goods, and the innocent beauty beneath is invisible in a society where semblance is all.~~

~~The scene is echoed later on when Veronica, now married to John-Ferdinand, finds him looking at a recent photograph of Bertie, this time very much a portrait of a socialite, with its deliberately flattering pose and artificial flowers:~~

~~The picture resembled an imaginary type of beauty in a book of engravings rather than Bertie. The simplicity and directness of pose and manner, amounting almost to awkwardness, which was the character of her beauty, was lost. (23)~~

~~Ironically, for John-Ferdinand the photo serves to highlight the simple purity of his wife's face, banishing for ever the image that has haunted him, Bertie's 'child's face', "a white face with great innocent eyes". Veronica uses this moment of closeness between them later to extract the story of Bertie's seduction from him. John-Ferdinand feels he can legitimately break his promise of silence to Bertie for Veronica is now, as his wife, not "someone else. You are me, myself"! (24)~~

Veronica's subtlety and guile are often emphasized. After she has broken Bertie's photograph she closes the portrait case with "smooth quickness" and is seen to "glide" from the room with her characteristically

"long, even steps". Her movement in this scene is rapid, stealthy, reptilian. Are we meant to remember the pale yellow cobra of 'The Prelude' which moved "krinkle krinkle krinkle" over the grass "with a sound like a lady walking in a stiff, starched print dress"? The child Rebekah was not afraid of snakes.

Since she understood what they were, she was not afraid of them, but they had become a nightmare to her. They spoiled her world. (25)

The cobra suddenly prompts in her

a sense of an abandoned wickedness somewhere: it was almost as if ~~she herself were a snake~~, and had gone ~~krinkle!-krinkle!-krinkle!~~ over the grass. She had a sense of ~~all the world being abandonedly wicked.~~ (26)

Innocence and experience, childhood and adulthood, girl and woman, self and society, are all fused in this one powerful scene. The child must eventually enter a world where snake-like women are a part of 'herself' in the sense that their sex dictates how they as individuals must operate in a masculine society.

"Women think", announces Rebekah's husband Frank as if lighting upon a hitherto unrecognized truth,

that men don't see through them when they ogle and flirt and try to captivate every fellow they meet, but we do! That style of woman's all very well to dance and flirt with, but when he really wants a wife and means to settle down he looks for something different. (27)

Here the sisters are again seen as opposites, the wife and the whore. 'That style of woman' lies before them in a ball dress on her bed. Bertie has fled in panic and shame from her whispered 'reputation' in the ladies powder room. Frank sees her merely as "a magnificent creature" - "And so unconscious! That's what men like."

Bertie's sensual 'unconsciousness' is a feature Schreiner stresses throughout the novel, from the first detailed description we are given of her entry into adulthood at Thorn Kloof:

The exuberant brown curls were gathered into a knot at the back of her head which showed better the beautiful outline of her small round neck and broad shoulders and the small round head. She had grown .. into a magnificent woman; but she had become quiet, the noisy gaiety of her early girlhood had passed, and she spoke and moved almost heavily. She would have been almost majestic if it had not been for the infant like expression of the face, and something uncertain and almost wavering in her walk, rising from the fact that her feet were almost too small for her body. Her rich colouring was more perfect than ever; but in her round brown eyes there was a slight wistfulness, almost as though asking a perpetual question; and the corners of her small full lipped mouth were more drawn in than they had been, as though always wearing a placid, half-smile. (28)

~~Occasionally she verges dangerously on the edge of caricature~~ Bertie as the Perfect, Placid, Pleasing female whose sole aim in life is to love and be loved. In many ways she resembles Hardy's Tess, a beautiful victim of circumstance and social hypocrisy. Descriptions of Bertie often echo Hardy's lyrical portraits of his milkmaid's sensuality. (29) And like Em, in African Farm, who is physically and emotionally of the same type, "her idea of love was only service". (30)

Both women are callously rejected by men for whom such service and devotion represents all that is ideal in a woman. John-Ferdinand tells Rebekah how as a young man he was drawn first to her by her "intellect", "strange intensity", "delicate physical refinement and beauty" and "your devotion to your duties", but that his attraction to Bertie was altogether different. "For the first time I understand now how men have made a god of woman - the eternal virgin mother!.." (31)

Both the sisters fulfil the male image of this timeless archetype of femininity, Bertie through her beauty and caring for others, Rebekah through her 'devotion to her duties', her role as wife and mother. And both women are betrayed by their very goodness. Bertie is hunted in her dreams by "something with heavy breath; she knew its tongue lolled out and she heard its steps" (32) as she tries to escape her own sexuality which

in the eyes of society has branded her a prostitute. Rebekah is trapped in the family home, her sexual identity stifled by lack of love, her intellect and 'strange intensity' suffocated by the weight of her wifely 'devotion to her duties'. For her there is hope; there remain other outlets for self-expression. To John-Ferdinand she explains how she and Bertie personify two types of woman:

Some women with complex, many-sided natures, if love fails them and one half of their nature dies, can still draw a kind of broken life through the other. The world of the impersonal is left them; they can still turn fiercely towards it, and through the intellect draw in a kind of life - a poor, broken, half-asphyxiated life, not what it might have been; like the life of a man with one lung eaten out by disease, who has to live through the other alone; but still life. But Bertie and such as Bertie have only one life possible, the life of the personal relations; if that fails them, all fails. (33)

This is clearly Schreiner speaking, from the depths of her 'many-sided nature' using the familiar physical images to describe her own experience as a woman, often literally 'half-asphyxiated' by a disease which was directly linked to her sexuality, and to the demands she made on herself to succeed as a writer. She contrasts two worlds, the 'impersonal' and the 'life of the personal relations' much as E. M. Forster was later to polarize them, in his novel of sisterhood Howard's End, as being essentially representative of male and female. (34) Bertie, feminine to her fingertips, vulnerable, passively receptive rather than active, cannot survive when love fails her in a patriarchal society which denies her right to self-expression. Her sister, who combines 'mannish' physical capability and intellectual vigour with female sensitivity and emotional depth, can live a life of sorts, torn like Olive Schreiner between the inner world of the emotions and the outer world of duty.

I must stress that I am here using Schreiner's, not my own perceptions in my definition of what is 'male' and 'female'. Although they frequently seem to accord in the novel with accepted Victorian standards of gender

distinction there remains a marked tension and confusion throughout Rebekah's thought and behaviour which prohibits both an easy acceptance of her as an aspiring New Woman or dismissal as a disappointingly stereotyped and self-sacrificing heroine of the nineteenth century novel. In her study of sex and gender in society, Ann Oakley writes:

That people are male or female can usually be judged by referring to the biological evidence. That they are masculine or feminine cannot be judged in the same way: the criteria are cultural, differing with time and place. The constancy of sex must be admitted, but so also must the variability of gender. (35)

In exposing the very limitations of what being feminine or being masculine imposes on the individual psyche in From Man to Man, Schreiner stretches, if not breaks, those boundaries, and does more than hint at the variability of gender in the process.

Rebekah's responses to Frank in her long letter to him in chapter eight echo much of Schreiner's own ambivalence and despair in her correspondence as she agonized over the inequality of sexual relationships and the conflicting feelings of envy, attraction and anger she experienced about men. In semi-conscious, dreaming moments Rebekah can let herself fantasize about 'how nice it would be to be a man':

She fancied she was one till she felt her very body grow strong and hard and shaped like a man's. She felt the great freedom opened to her, no place shut off from her, the long chain broken, all work possible for her, no law to say this and this is for woman, you are woman ... (36)

She can long for the strength and hardness of the male body and all the power that goes with it yet the man she 'becomes' in her fantasy is a caring, gentle one, full of "a great tenderness" towards his wife. If she found such tenderness lacking in Frank after their marriage, she writes to him, she thought then "it was because your deeper man's nature had not need for these small forms of expression when the central union was there". (37) Again she accepts a split between man and woman in spite of her androgynous

fantasizing where the two become one; Frank's nature is different, 'deeper', and her acceptance of that cultural conditioning and her corresponding role blinds her for a long time to the reality of her situation and her awareness of Frank's double standards, his possession of both wife and whore.

Like Schreiner, Rebekah becomes self-punitive, self-doubting:

Frank, I have tried to blame myself; I have sought, as a rat in a trap seeks a way of escape, to find out I was wrong and you were right. I have tried to understand you. I do even now see there may be elements in your nature forcing you almost irresistibly to certain courses of action that I cannot rightly understand, because those forces are not in me. I see that I must be unjust to you if I measure you by my standard. Can love and marriage and the relationship of human to human have the same meaning to you and to me, when in everything else we differ? (38)

Here, although acknowledging certain fundamental differences in gender which are essentially Victorian in their acceptance of greater male sex-drive - the coyly vague reference to 'elements' of Frank's 'nature' 'forcing' him 'almost irresistibly to certain courses of action' - Rebekah sees their different temperaments as responsible for their incompatibility. Yet as she goes on to analyse these differences and, in particular, their individual responses to the natural world, and Frank's delight in "winning, conquering, taking", Rebekah returns inevitably to the question of sex and love:

What if for you a woman is only 'sport'? What if there is something irresistible in your nature which compels you to feel that the woman who has once wholly given herself to you is a dead bird, a fish, through whose gills you have put your fingers? (39)

This central chapter returns again and again to the theme of masculine ruthlessness, possession, destruction as Rebekah/Olive cries out desperately

Oh, it isn't only the body of a woman that a man touches when he takes her in his hands; it's her brain, it's her intellect, it's her whole life! He puts his hand in among the finest cords of her being and rends and tears them if he will, so that they never produce anything more but discord and disharmony ... (40)



Woman is likened to a passive instrument from which man can "draw out all the music" if he treats her gently. Rebekah never questions the traditional role of the woman within the family structure - "a woman can bear all and do all if the arms of a man are tight about her" (41) - nor does she confront fully the question of her own desire, although she demands an end to the "long life of silence and repression and deception". (42) Somehow there is no room within the claustrophobic text to deal with these issues. Yet beneath the steady build-up of moral indignation and personal outrage as Rebekah becomes more aware and more analytical lurks a repulsion from Frank, and from men in general - those guffawing crude associates of the billiard room and the office - which occasionally breaks through in Rebekah's letter: She recalls a moment when her wifely devotion was suddenly shaken:

We were sitting at dinner at the time you were still friendly with the station master's niece. You were eating with your eyes fixed intently on your plate, but evidently not thinking of what you were eating. As I looked up at you, as I looked at your mouth and your jaw, a wave of horror swept over me. It was not as if you were the man who was myself, but any other man whom one might see at a restaurant for the first time. The horror and shrinking swept over me so I rose and left the table. If I had continued to feel so, then I must have left you at once. (43)

This seems very much a picture of man as Other, an alien being reduced to a frighteningly devouring 'mouth' and 'jaw'. Suddenly Rebekah sees her husband as 'any other man', capable of brutality and oppression. It is this realisation she has consciously repressed during much of her married life, flinging herself into maternity and domestic labour:

I let down an iron door without a crack between that part of my brain which knew about it and the rest of my mind; and I worked without stopping. But I was conscious there was a deadened part of my brain lying behind that iron door all the while, waiting to come to life. I had talked so much to myself always about the duty of not shutting one's eyes to anything and facing all facts; and now I was trying to keep my eyes shut. (44)

When she opens her eyes and experiences such a gut reaction 'a wave of horror' hits her: "it was not as if you were the man who was myself." These words of Rebekah's/Olive's surely carry a double meaning, referring both to the contemporary ideal of marriage as a union of souls - we remember John-Ferdinand's words to Veronica, 'You are me, myself!' - and also to the masculine element within Rebekah herself, or rather to the maleness she envys and the power she craves. 'How nice to be a man ...' No wonder her violent antipathy towards Frank must be that of a passing moment, and remain "only as a terrible memory", for such feelings are too difficult to absorb as she tries to realise theoretical possibilities of open and equal relationships between woman and man.

By the end of Rebekah's letter her voice has become even more audibly Schreiner's own, as, writing desperately to break down the silence between her and Frank, she deletes paragraphs, scribbles hurriedly and illegibly, and pauses to pace the room:

Oh, can't we speak the truth to one another just like two men? ... Oh, nothing can be so terrible as this awful silence that has been between us through these long years. It is that that has crushed me, always to hold myself down with an iron hand. I do not ask you to love me, only to speak the truth to me, as you would if I were another man. (45) [My emphases]

The final paragraph is extraordinarily similar to Olive's confused plea to Cronwright before their marriage (46), when Rebekah's handwriting suddenly becomes "quite changed" as she becomes again the frightened child, the 'little woman':

O Frank, my love, my husband, please help me! I want to do what is right and I cannot see the way! I am like a little child that has lost itself in the wood and it is dark everywhere. Oh, please take my hand and help me. You are much stronger than I; you are the only human being who can help me. Take my hand in yours and let us find the path. (47)

Paul Foot, in his introduction to the Virago edition of the novel, complains gently that it seems

a bit of a cheek to take the title for the book from a quotation which calls for charity ('From man to man nothing matters but charity') and yet to show no charity at all to the wretched males in the book, nor even to the gossiping women, Veronica and Mrs. Drummond. (48)

First and Scott talk of the "extreme polarization of the sexes" Schreiner sets up. "The male world was brutally, callously sensual, and the female a retreat into a passionate motherhood or social ostracism." (49)

Certainly all the main male characters in the novel - the effete John-Ferdinand, animal-like Frank, the stereotyped rich, insensitive Jew, and even the potential New Man, Drummond, little more than a cardboard cut-out - are unsympathetically and sometimes cruelly portrayed. Admittedly there is little charity in From Man to Man, and not that much evidence of a celebration of sisterhood for which the novel is recommended; in its place is a lot of anger and bitterness and confusion. It is there, for me, that the raw strength of the novel lies. And in the tension between the two poles of male and female, as shown both through the characterization of men and women in the novel, and the masculine and feminine possibilities within women themselves, is focussed more tentative questioning and exploration through an examination of Rebekah's, and Bertie's, and Veronica's personal 'disco-ordination' than I think First and Scott acknowledge.

Gregory Rose, in The Story of an African Farm, is, like Veronica Grey, a curious character. If Veronica's surname was intentionally chosen to suggest the shadowy, indeterminate nature of her sexuality, perhaps Gregory's is meant to reinforce his effeminacy, a predominant trait which from his introduction more than half-way through the novel, serves initially, it seems, to incur the reader's derision. Certainly Schreiner, through the character of Lyndall, treats him with a harsh and biting scorn, much as

Rebekah contemplated critically Veronica's mannish lack of charm. Unlike Veronica, Gregory is seen to change and develop within the novel. He crosses the gender barrier in what must surely be one of the most daring and innovative explorations of sex roles in the nineteenth century novel. His progression towards 'womanhood' in the twelfth chapter of part two, and his different relationships with the two cousins, Em and Lyndall, are worth close study for the insight they give into Schreiner's perception of cultural conditioning and sexual identity.

It is important to be aware of the context within which Gregory's transformation takes place. African Farm is very different, structurally and thematically, from From Man to Man. It is a spiritual, rather than a social, novel, if one can use such labels so bluntly. The interplay of the kindred souls of Lyndall and Waldo (50), set against the elemental vastness of the Karroo, the mixture with the narrative of dream and allegory, flashback and vision, reinforce the sense that Schreiner is tracing the development of the individual psyche within the universe rather than the growth of specifically male or female awareness of self within society. The political drive behind Lyndall's feminist analysis of herself and the social structure is undeniably potent, and in the second half of the novel grows stronger, with the introduction of Gregory Rose and her 'Stranger', and her confrontations with both men. Yet her bitterly perceptive observations about the female lot merge occasionally into a transcendental vision of humanity as one. To Waldo she explains how it entertains her to

trace out the resemblance between one man and another: to see how Tant' Sannie and I, you and Bonaparte; Simon on his pillar, and the Emperor dining off larks' tongues, are one and the same compound, merely mixed in different proportions. What is microscopic in one is largely developed in another; what is rudimentary in one man is an active organ in another; but all things are in all men, and one soul is the model of all. We shall find nothing new in human nature after we have once dissected and analysed the one being we ever shall truly know - ourself. (51)

At the same time such a mystical over-view of the unity of everything seems to detract from her feminist consciousness of her own predicament and women's oppression in general:

When my own life feels small, and I am oppressed with it, I like to crush together, and see it in a picture, in an instant, a multitude of disconnected unlike phases of human life ... [she imagines a mediaeval monk, little Malay boys, a Hindoo philosopher, a troop of Bacchanalians, a martyr, a Roman epicurean, a Kaffir witch-doctor, a mother feeding her children.] ... I like to see it all; I feel it run through me - that life belongs to me; it makes my little life larger; it breaks down the narrow walls that shut me in. (52)

It is within this disconcerting and, at times, uneasy balancing of spiritual quest and political inquiry that Gregory Rose's remarkable 'sex-change' takes place. In the context of 'one soul' being the model of all and the recurring emphasis on the exploration of self, we can safely assume that his sexual ambivalence reflects not only on other characters in the novel but reveals an intrinsic part of Schreiner herself.

Our first picture of Gregory Rose seems set to restore the element of burlesque comedy which the magniloquent Bonaparte Blenkins brought to the first section of the novel. His self-absorbed letters home on pink crested note paper to his sister Jemima ("He always wrote to her when he was miserable ... He forgot her when he was happy") have, in their florid language and sense of melodrama, much the same flavour as Bonaparte's tall stories (54) and his lurid, self-styled 'sermon'. (55) However, it is immediately apparent that Gregory, "the new man", is a much rounder, and more puzzling, character than the buccaneering Irish opportunist.

In many ways a typical Victorian male he has always relied on women, his mother and sister - who is described as 'his safety-valve' (56) - for emotional support. His makeshift house at the farm is decorated with Illustrated London News cut-outs, "in which there was a noticeable preponderance of female faces and figures". (57) He considers looking at



his own reflection in the mirror "unmanly", and views Lyndall's assertive behaviour and speech as "unwomanly". Once established as a suitor to Em, a replacement mother-figure ("she is making me some woollen shirts; but they don't fit me so nicely as those mother made me")(58), he readily asserts his authority to order her life:

if I tell her to put on a certain dress, that dress she puts on; and if I tell her to sit on a certain seat, on that seat she sits; and if I tell her not to speak to a certain individual, she does not speak to them. (59)

He reminds Jemima proudly of how he responded to paternal pressure: "I have borne it all; not as a woman, who whines for every touch, but as a man should - in silence." (60)

Conversely, the 'feminine' side to his nature is steadily played up by Schreiner. He is allowed to yearn, and suffer and give vent to his emotions in love. He recoils from Waldo's coarseness, and keeps his room fastidiously neat with "a little duster folded in the corner of his table-drawer just as he had seen his mother do". (61) His father called him 'a noodle and a milksop' simply because he didn't understand his 'fine nature' (62) he protests poutingly to Jemima. Lyndall mocks such refinement in a man, seeing him instead as:

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! (63)

It is interesting that Lyndall sees femininity not as an innate quality. Her scathing remarks also prepare the reader in a sense for the beskirted, subservient Gregory to come.

However, in the initial scenes of his wooing of Em he embodies all the demanding possessiveness of the male which both attracted and repelled Schreiner in her own relationships, and against which Lyndall determinedly rebels. Immediately jealous of Em's strong attachment to Waldo and Lyndall, he demands an all-exclusive love:

You must love me, love me better than all! You must give yourself to me ... You were made for me, created for me! (64)

This is the destructive power relationship Lyndall describes to her lover when she tells him:

Your man's love is a child's love for butterflies. You follow till you have the thing, and break it. If you have broken one wing, and the thing flies still, then you love it more than ever, and follow till you break both; then you are satisfied when it lies still on the ground. (65)

The image is again that of man as conquering predator, Rebekah's picture of Frank's fingers through the fish's gills. This is the cold, cruel, sensual demand Schreiner spoke of to Karl Pearson, the insistent voice of the possessive lover:

You must be mine! I will win your love though you die for it. I will tear you to pieces but I must have you! (66)

In the relationship between Gregory and Em the sexes are thus polarised, with him assuring her that 'no woman can love as a man can' (67), and Em meekly acknowledging this, somewhat overcome by the vehemence of Gregory's passion and his 'seething eyes': "I cannot love you so much as you love me. Perhaps it is because I am only a woman; but I do love you as much as I can." (68) Like Baby Bertie and like the lost 'little girl' part of Schreiner, (69) she is hungry for love - "she had given out so much love in her little life, and had got none of it back with interest". (70) Having been elevated to the status of love object she is able both to lament her unattractiveness with a new consciousness of what that means for a woman - "My hands are as short and broad as a duck's foot, and my forehead is so low, and I haven't any nose. I can't be pretty" (71) - and yet at the same time to set herself favourably against her cousin: "You could not help seeing that she is prettier .. but you will never be able to like anyone so much as you like me." (72)

In between Gregory's transferring of his affections from one cousin to the other comes Tant' Sannie's 'upsitting' scene, in which the issue of sexual jealousy is again raised by Schreiner. Here the reader is reminded of Lyndall's words to Waldo: "Everything has two sides - the outside that is ridiculous, and the inside that is solemn." (73) Throughout this section of the novel in particular Schreiner skilfully blends the solemn and the ridiculous, and in Little Piet Vander Walt's ludicrous wooing of Tant' Sannie we have another perspective on the oppressive institution of marriage, this time rooted firmly in the Boer tradition of 'upsitting' (74) with some delightful attention to detail: the wearily performed affectations of Little Piet and the stolid simpering of Tant' Sannie - a parody of the romantic ardour felt by Em and the sexual passion of Lyndall and her Stranger.

Once more we are offered pictures of woman's place in society. Piet's definition of a good wife, as he remembers his dead partner, is linked to the limited power of domesticity, woman as ruler of the hearth: "I've known her break a churn-stick over a maid's head for only letting dust come on a milk-cloth." (75) At which telling revelation Tant' Sannie feels 'a twinge of jealousy'; "she had never broken a churn-stick on a maid's head". Piet's wife also wields her power in the arena of sexual competition, making Piet vow before her death, using the thinly disguised device of their dead baby's prophetic warnings, never to marry her younger sister, an attractive rival. Thus this scene entertainingly throws light on the oppressive, insular nature of Boer society in particular, and woman's lot in general.

It is in the setting of Tant' Sannie's wedding, with its colourful ceremony and ribald ritual, that Lyndall's plans for Gregory's part in her rejection of the system take root. The two of them are set apart from



the general throng, Gregory through his snobbish distaste for the raw high spirits of the farming community, and Lyndall in both educated background and appearance. "She was dressed in black, which seemed to take her yet further from the white-clad, gewgawed women about her; and the little hands were white, and the diamond ring glittered." (76)

The ring she wears, a present from her lover, symbolizes a social definition of a relationship from the constraints of which Lyndall is trying to free herself. "Sometimes I wear it; then I take it off and wish to throw it into the fire; the next day I put it on again; and sometimes I kiss it;" (77) she tells her lover, expressing the contradictions inherent in her passionate love for him and her hatred of the role he and society therefore expect her to play. Above all she dreads the loss of autonomy, the sinking into subservience for the sake of propriety and financial security. Like Rebekah she comes to see such a relationship as nothing more than prostitution: "a woman who has sold herself, ever for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way". (78)

When Em notices the ring for the first time and exclaims in delight, Lyndall draws her hand quickly away, assuring her she will put her neck beneath no man's foot. It is both a poignant and amusing scene, highlighting the differences between the cousins and their experiences of love and sex with gentle irony. When Lyndall rails against the inconstancy of men Em, who is to be rejected so soon by the fickle and insincere Gregory, reminds her cousin she "does not know men", assuming with the complacency of newly-found love "the dignity of superior knowledge so universally affected by affianced and married women in discussing man's nature with their uncontracted sisters". Her innocent air of "condescending magnanimity" causes the wordly-wise Lyndall "intense amusement" as she draws Em's

attention to her error: "she twirled a massive ring upon her forefinger - a ring more suitable for the hand of a man and noticeable in design - a diamond cross set into gold with the initials 'R. R.' below it". (79)

It is as Gregory leans forward to try and make out the letters on the ring at Tant' Sannie's wedding celebrations that he becomes aware of Lyndall looking at him, "at the man, Gregory Rose", with unusual attention. (80) Later, on a kopje by the farm, Gregory blurts out his love for her, a chivalric ideal of selfless servitude: "if I might but always be near you to serve you, I would be utterly, utterly happy. I would ask nothing in return!" (81) And Lyndall then uses his own words to make a "plain, matter-of-fact" bargain with him. Now pregnant by her lover and refusing to bind herself to him legally, she demands from Gregory his name in marriage. Proposing this on her own terms, for her own reasons, - "You will give everything, and expect nothing" - she transposes the conventional male/female roles in marriage, and subverts Rose himself. She sees him derisively as "a little tin duck floating on a dish of water, that comes after a piece of bread stuck on a needle, and the more the needle pricks it the more it comes on", (82) and also likens him to the dog, Doss, in an image reminiscent of Undine's masochistic passion for the domineering Albert Blair. (83)

He licks my hand because I love him; and I allow him to.  
Where I do not love I do not allow it. I believe you  
love me; I too could love so, that to lie under the foot  
of the thing I loved would be more heaven than to lie in  
the breast of another. (84)

This is surely a strange ideal of love for the strong-minded feminist who proclaimed she was in no great hurry to lose her independence in favour of a life of submissiveness and crying babies. Schreiner's confused responses to her own sexuality seem to dictate Lyndall's ambivalent reactions to the machismo of her lover and to Gregory's effeminacy.

With her stranger, stereotypically and blandly attractive like all Schreiner's heroes - tall, with "drooping eyelids" and a "heavy flaxen moustache" (85) - Lyndall fluctuates between assertion of her rights and needs and her accepting reliance on his strong arms and dominant manner. As she angrily acknowledges his want to 'master' her he feels "a strong inclination to stoop down and kiss the little lips that defied him", (86) a version of the patronising cliché used by every fondly dominating male, 'I love you when you look angry'. Yet Lyndall plays up to this 'masterful' role; she loves him, she says, because he is strong and the first man she was ever afraid of. In the same breath she speaks in the voice of the New Woman, rejecting the bonds of monogamy and instead embracing exploration, and new directions in relationships: "I like to experience, I like to try. You don't understand that." (87)

Interestingly, with Gregory Rose Lyndall has from the start the upper hand, the power and control, and he plays the submissive 'female' role in their inverted relationship. In the scene on the kopje Lyndall is cool, flippant, discursive, detached, while Gregory is pleading, confused, pliable. He protests petulantly, using "a more sorely aggrieved tone than ever", (88) that she has never treated Waldo in such a manner. He is put out by her mockery - "you are making fun of me now, you really are!" (89) He suffers a "burst of uncontrollable ardour" with the "blood rushing to his head and face". Bent before her as she makes her practical proposal of marriage, Gregory looks up to the woman he is promising to serve:

Was it contempt, loathing, pity, that moved in the eyes above? He could not tell; but he stooped over the little foot and kissed it.  
She smiled. (90)

It is a strangely disturbing image of power and powerlessness, and all the more so by being followed by the counteracting statement of Lyndall's about masochistic, self-deprecatory love - 'to lie under the foot of the thing I

loved would be more heaven than to lie in the breast of another'. At this moment she and Gregory are seen as equals in their experience of suffering and subjection.

With the sudden departure of Lyndall from the farm the masculine part of Gregory is seen to diminish rapidly as his all-consuming wish to find and serve Lyndall takes over.

Em wished that he would still sometimes talk of the strength and master-right of man; but Gregory was as one smitten on the cheek-bone. She might do what she pleased, he would find no fault, had no word to say. He had forgotten that it is man's right to rule... (91)

His discovery of Em's mother's clothes in the loft is, characteristically, when he is cleaning. Carefully he shakes and folds each garment and as he does so the possibilities for disguise strike him: "his fingers moved slower and slower, then his chin rested on his breast, and finally the imploring blue eyes were fixed on the frill abstractedly." (92) Although unlike the 'singular' scene with Veronica in From Man to Man, there is no explicit mention of a sensual attraction to the clothes and what they represent, other than a disguising device, those 'imploring blue eyes', described in the next paragraph looking out from under the 'kappje' with "mild gentleness" increase the sense of affinity Gregory has for this external image of womanhood. Nevertheless, he looks round "furtively" as he tries on a dress. Schreiner has given the scene both a feeling of rightness, almost inevitability, and yet retained an awareness of his behaviour as something slightly perverted, socially unacceptable. At the same time the familiar use of mockery, the contemptuous edge to Lyndall's voice and that of the writer, is noticeably absent here, replaced by an almost sympathetic tone.

In becoming more truly a woman, renouncing the masculine elements of his personality and with them his pomposity and petty self-obsession,

Gregory becomes a more likeable character. Yet as he embraces femaleness he also fully adopts his mission of servitude; having significantly selected the dress of a 'sister-of-mercy', he becomes, like Schreiner's heroines themselves, self-abnegatory, self-punitive. He assures Em he cherishes no illusions about Lyndall's feeling for him:

I should have known at first she never could suffer me. Who am I; what am I, that she should look at me? It was right that she left me; right that she should not look at me. If any one says it is not, it is a lie! I am not going to speak to her, he added - 'only to see her; only to stand sometimes in a place where she has stood before'. (93)

That plaintive 'who am I, what am I' is echoed later when Gregory adopts his disguise as a nurse for the dying Lyndall. It is a striking scene. In a dry gully, or 'sloot', on the barren Karroo he contemplates his change of identity, "Am I, am I Gregory Nazianzen Rose?" (94) The picture is evocative of the central theme of the novel - this questing individual, at a turning point in his life, alone in the vastness of land and sky. As always Schreiner's eye is acute, her description simply but intensely atmospheric.

At his feet the dusty ants ran about, and the high red bank before him was covered by a network of roots and fibres washed bare by the rains. Above his head rose the clear blue African sky; at his side were the saddle-bags full of woman's clothing. (95)

It is an unlikely scene, this disguised man in an "old-fashioned gown" and "a great pinked-out collar" setting up a mirror and shaving there in the wilderness of the veld. But in the context of the novel, with its charting of the growth of the individual's psyche and its feeling for the elemental flux of nature, the bizarre quality of such an event seems an inevitable part of the texture of the whole, that peculiar blend of the solemn and the ridiculous. "It was all so strange, he sitting there in that 'sloot' in that up-country plain! - strange as the fantastic, changing shapes in a summer cloud." (96)

Once accepted and instated as nurse to Lyndall, Gregory's 'strangeness' disappears as he adopts the role of sister-of-mercy, and Lyndall, the formerly headstrong and independent woman, that of the patient. This, of course, was a relationship familiar to Schreiner, and one that appears in all three novels. Both Undine and Rebekah are, alternately, invalid and nurse. It was a relationship which for Schreiner and Ellis, temporarily at least, blocked off the need to acknowledge their sexuality through an absorption in the roles of service and suffering. (97)

For the gentle Ellis Olive's periods of illness granted him a sense of power and possession that would be otherwise, for a man with strong opinions about equality between the sexes, linked to feelings of guilt. He wrote to her of the contradictions of such a role: "When you are ill, I am sad and also happy, then you belong to me. When you are well, I am glad and miserable; you don't belong to me, my heart aches." (98)

There is a similar curious tension in the bedside scenes with Gregory and Lyndall, increased by our knowledge of his 'sex-change'. Only as a 'woman' and as a nurse can he approach her; as a man, an 'unmanly' man, he excited merely her derision. Lyndall remains to the end unaware of her tender nurse's real identity, but the reader is made to feel Gregory's pain and passion. Any intimacy is overtly de-sexualised because of his disguise and the nature of their carer/sufferer roles, but at such moments there is a strange eroticism (entirely unconscious on Schreiner's part?), brought about by the reader's awareness of Gregory's masculinity.

She still drew her lips together, and motioned with her fingers towards the dog who lay sleeping at her feet. Gregory lifted him and laid him at her side. She made Gregory turn open the bosom of her night-dress that the dog might put his black muzzle between her breasts. She crossed her arms over him. Gregory left them lying there together. (99)

Yet Gregory is not seen to experience any physical attraction to the helpless woman in his care. His sacrifice of identity, and Lyndall's suffering,

have invested him with a purity, almost a saintliness:

He lifted her. Ah! a shrunken little body, he could feel its weakness as he touched it. His hands were to him glorified for what they had done. (100)

As with Ellis, there is an element of pleasure in the patient's pain, in that it enables him to realise his need to serve:

At first Gregory's heart was sore when day by day the body grew lighter, and the mouth he fed took less; but afterwards he grew accustomed to it, and was happy. For passion has one cry, one only - "Oh, to touch thee, Beloved! (101) -

~~There is from time to time a rather disturbing objectification of Lyndall throughout these scenes; she is simply 'the body', 'the mouth':~~ When the landlady of the hotel first brings Gregory to her bedside she notes, detachedly, that Lyndall is "a pretty thing, isn't it?" From the foot of the bed Gregory looks up

at what lay on the cushion. A little white, white face, transparent as an angel's, with a cloth bound round the forehead, and with soft short hair tossed about on the pillow. 'We had to cut it off', said the woman, touching it with her forefinger. 'Soft as silk, like a wax-doll's.' (102)

Lyndall in her illness has become for others an angel and a doll.

Similar as these scenes are to others depicting female illnesses and lingering deaths in many Victorian novels, Lyndall's strength of purpose, her struggle to retain her sense of identity even at this bleakest, most alienated point in her life, save Schreiner's descriptions from sinking into melodrama or sentimentality. As Lyndall tells Gregory of the death of her baby she deliberately 'hardens herself':

I did not love it; its father was not my prince; I did not care for it; but it was so little. (103)

The same regret and sadness, coupled with determined resolve characterize her letter to her lover, refusing his proposal of marriage and 'perfect freedom', unacceptable to her on his terms:

You will call me mad, foolish - the world would do so; but I know what I need and the kind of path I must walk in. I cannot marry you. I will always love you for the sake of what lay by me those three hours; but there it ends. I must know and see, I cannot be bound to one whom I love as I love you. I am afraid of the world - I will fight the world. One day ... I shall find what I have wanted all my life; something nobler, stronger than I, before which I can kneel down. You lose nothing by not having me now; I am a weak, selfish, erring woman. One day I shall find something to worship ... (104)

This is surely Schreiner's own voice once more, sharing Lyndall's zest for life and all its experiences - 'I must know and see' - and her wish to find something (someone?) 'nobler, stronger' to 'worship'. She echoes Schreiner's own severe self-criticism - 'I am a weak, selfish, erring woman' - and her ambition and self-confidence - 'I know what I need and the kind of path I must walk in'. As a new pathfinder, a woman ahead of her time, Lyndall must find herself 'at last in solitudes where the silence is deadly', and she dies a lonely death on the dark plains of the Karroo.

With her death Gregory retreats into a conventional male role as husband, obeying Lyndall's command that he must marry Em. But he remains uncomfortable, detached from this position. In the final chapter of the novel he sits apart from the woman's world of Tant' Sannie and Em and their domestic discussions

with his dead pipe lying on the bench beside him, and his blue eyes gazing out far across the flat, like one who sits on the sea-shore watching that which is fading, fading from him. (105)

Em is seen to feel a similar sense of loss with his return to her too late. Her description to Waldo of a childhood incident which captures this feeling is evocative both of her innocence and femininity:

I remember once, very long ago, when I was a very little girl, my mother had a work-box full of coloured reels. I always wanted to play with them, but she would never let me. At last one day she said I might take the box. I was so glad I hardly knew what to do. I ran round the house, and sat down with it on the back steps. But when I opened the box all the cottons were taken out. (106)



This memory has the directness and poignancy which Schreiner used to such remarkable effect in the Prelude of From Man to Man. It is indicative of her power as a writer that she can blend personal, intimate moments like these, and the elegiac tone of the chapter's opening scene of peaceful domesticity on the farm and the final gentle, almost unnoticeable, death of Waldo with the hilarious re-introduction of Tant' Sannie.

Her vast girth, her vulgarity, her rumbustious declamations on men and marriage contrast strangely with the inward, isolated musings of Em, Gregory and Waldo. Schreiner blends the earthy and the spiritual by throwing the reader from one to the other, exercising to the full her ability to entertain with daring skills. Like a music-hall turn Tant' Sannie holds forth:

Some men are fat, and some men are thin; some men drink brandy, and some men drink gin; but it all comes to the same thing in the end; it's all one. A man's a man, you know.'

Here they came upon Gregory, who was sitting in the shade before the house. (107)

The irony of this simplistic view of the male sex is both highly amusing, as we recall Gregory's 'womanhood', and also touchingly said, as we feel his present loss of the potential for continuing change and growth into 'new man'-hood.

With Lyndall's death it seems the element of self-exploration and questioning of sexual identity in the novel is lost beneath Waldo's final vision of the world as "an evil world, a deceitful, treacherous, mirage-like world, it might be; but a lovely world for all that". (108) If Gregory Rose's transformation in the desert seems now curiously 'mirage-like', we must remember Schreiner's conviction that "waking dreams" or "sleeping dreams" are "still the reflections of a reality". (109) With the characters of Gregory Rose and Lyndall she was able to realise

contradictory facets of her own sexuality and to explore tentatively the issue of gender in this many-layered novel which seems, ultimately, to be more concerned with the souls than the sex of its protagonists. Nadine Gordimer, a sensitive critic of Schreiner who owes much to her work, has carefully weighed up the elements of spirituality and sexual politics in the novel:

It is one of those open-ended works whose strength lies at the level where human lives - our own and the book's characters' - plunge out of grasp. The freedom that Lyndall .. burns for is .. essentially spiritual freedom in the context of the oppression of women through their sexual role; yet the passion of revolt is so deeply understood that it seems to hold good for all sufferings of oppression. (110)

Into her first novel, Undine, the young Schreiner poured such 'passion of revolt'. With the story of her 'queer little child' growing up into an 'unwomanly' adulthood she set out to explore the themes of gender, love and sexual relationships which were to appear, re-worked and refined, in the later books. In Undine's responses to men and women we recognise the experiences of both Lyndall and Rebekah; in the character of Henry Blair, and Undine's relationship with him, his father, and brother, we find a tangled network of ambivalent attitudes to sex and gender that was to be developed through the emergence of Veronica Grey and Gregory Rose.

Henry, George and Albert Blair are seen to represent different degrees of masculinity which Undine finds by turns fascinating and repellent. At her first encounter with Henry and George, Undine notes the similarities and differences between father and son:

Both were short and very broadly built, with round noses, round faces, blue eyes, scant beard, and sandy-coloured hair; but here the resemblance ended. In place of a painfully flexible and sensitive mouth, and eyes more soft and melting than a woman's, the father had thick, firm, pressed lips that told of a strong animal nature and an iron will, while the eyes above were so cold and dead that the great stone in his breast-pin gave out more light and warmth than they did. (111)

It is difficult to tell at this point which Undine finds preferable: the soft, warm femaleness of the son, or the cold, hard and brutal maleness of the father. The conversation which follows with Henry clarifies her feelings about him, with its tone of restrained mockery reminiscent of Lyndall's treatment of Gregory on the kopje. While Undine can see Henry as "a wonderful man, with a brain crammed as full of facts and ideas as a brain could be", she finds him also superficial, lacking any inner strength. "Just the backboneless, warm-hearted, weak character which nature had given him he had, and would have to the end of his days." (112)

His sensitive pliability as his passion for Undine grows is played up derisively by Schreiner, predicting her treatment of Gregory. He looks always 'up' to Undine, "with his great pleading woman's eyes". (113) He demands, like Gregory of Lyndall, that she treat him with seriousness and talk not just of the "smallest trivialities" which she reserves for the empty-minded, gossiping females of Greenwood.

The dark eyes above him looked down on him with that half-pitying, half-scornful look that was so often in them when they rested on him.

'You must be contented with what you get', she said.

'But you give me so very little'. (114)

Undine wields the power, sets the pace. Henry's very openness, his submissive adoration evokes in her an impatience, a hardness. His emotional softness is seen as a sign of immaturity, contrasted with his developed intellectual accomplishment. "She had a contemptuous pity for the great boy, with his manly years and his crammed brain, and his passionate love." (115) In a Darwinian image of the natural power struggle, Undine reinforces the sense of handicap his 'unmanliness' bestows on him in life:

'If a bird is only fitted to live among the marshes and reeds in the valley, why tempt it after you to the cold high rocks where the eagle finds a glorious life on the clear cold air?'

[Again, male power is linked to coldness, hardness]  
So Undine said to him, and so thinking, she made no attempt to lead her poor wild duck to the heights for which nature had never fitted him, and where he must die of frost and starvation. (116)

We remember that cruel image of Gregory as 'a little tin duck', feebly responding to and being led by the piece of bread stuck on a needle.

~~Henry's responses to Undine's detached and careless treatment of him are noticeably similar to her own reactions to the manly and domineering~~ Albert Blair. Henry alters his tastes and behaviour in a pathetic attempt to engage her attention: "I care nothing about it unless you give it to me" (117) - at the same time feeling both self-pity and disgust at such grovelling. Similarly, Undine mends her torn clothes and rejects her books in order to accord with Albert's preferences, only to feel anger at her self-distortion: "What a contemptible little wretch I am becoming ... to allow such trivialities to break into my real life and drive out higher thought." (118) She does not seem to understand herself and her actions: "In the presence of all other men and women she could walk erect. Why in this man's presence was she bowed down, wishing only to do and say what he might approve." (119) She feels contempt for Henry Blair serving her 'like a dog', yet she envys Albert's dog for being so thoroughly mastered by him.

Through Undine's reactions to the Blair brothers Schreiner seems to be playing out two parts of herself - her inclination towards such masochistic love and its corresponding loss of identity through physical passion, and her equally strong yearning for the power and detachment from emotional involvement which she could realise in a stereotypical male role. She both detests and envys Albert's ability to "freeze one or crush one to atoms with as little compunction as a fly" (120); she also wants to be the crushed and frozen object of such destructive power.

Albert is clearly the forerunner of Lyndall's lover and Rebekah's husband, with his commanding height, his "yellow-brown curls", the moustache over the "firm powerful lips", the cold blue eyes with the half-closed, drooping lids (121) shared by the Stranger, and, interestingly, the mannish Veronica Grey. Albert immediately exercises the same attraction for Undine as her older brother Frank did in her childhood - also tall, fair and handsome, whom we first meet lazily pelting ducks with bits of baked earth to amuse himself. (122) Frank's patronising term of endearment for the girl Undine was "little woman" (123); Albert's for her as his future wife is "my little girl". (124) Such men are seen by Schreiner to deny women their real status, their true identity. Women for them are merely extensions of their own personality in that they are their possessions. For Albert a wife "must shine and eclipse all women. Men must envy him his wife, as they did his dogs and his horses". (125)

Competitiveness, envy and betrayal surround Undine with her entry into the adult world and her dealings with men. The pathetic cousin Jonathan, who nurtured a disturbingly paedophilic love for the young Undine, is driven by jealousy to make implications about her unfaithfulness to Albert Blair. Immediately Albert sees Undine as an adult, capable of deceit and manipulation and no longer a child, innocent and malleable: "What small pity he had felt for the little girl who loved him was changed into loathing for the woman who had fooled him." (126) He then fully adopts "his father's creed" - that "all women have their value in coins, though some mount high". (127)

Rejected by Albert, Undine herself takes that creed and turns it round to her own advantage. Determined to 'serve' the disinherited Albert by the only means possible, she makes a marriage pact with his father. Whereas Lyndall wanted Gregory's name, Undine demands George's money. It

is a curious dichotomy, typical of Schreiner. Undine takes on the male role of bargainer, yet her reasons for wanting the money are typically 'female', in order to serve the man who has so abused her. She makes the terms of the marriage, yet she is also sacrificing her sexuality for a man. Ironically, in adopting and using patriarchal values, George Blair's 'creed', for the good of another she is seen to lose that essential element of Victorian femininity, her purity. Just as John-Ferdinand's 'eternal virgin mother', Baby Bertie, ruins herself through her honesty, Undine in her altruism destroys Henry Blair's faith in her:

There is nothing worth loving, nothing true, nothing noble in the world', he cried bitterly... She was not only as all women are, but lower than many: to sell herself, with her youth and talents, to an old and evil man for his money and lands: (128)

That Undine's sacrifice is in vain - for Albert himself marries into money -, that she must suffer the repulsive attentions of George Blair, "puffing and red with wine, soup, and exertion" (129), endure his "soft pulpy hand" (130) and bear his child, completes her tragic destiny. Such suffering seems, confusingly, for Schreiner to be linked with Undine's 'passion of revolt', her questioning defiance of convention, and yet also with her adherence still to the virtues of orthodox femininity, her self-denial, her very goodness. Martin Tucker, in his introduction to the Reprint Edition of the novel, explains this as part of Schreiner's own lack of stable identity, seeing her as

both an example and an analyst of that modern neurosis - ambivalence to one's self. At many times in her life she acted in a saintly manner, and always her heroines exemplify infinite patience and generosity and compassion. At other times her heroines and she mock themselves and seek a punishment to suit the guilt they feel but for which no crime is recorded. (131)

In deriding the 'feminine' men, Henry and Gregory, are Undine and Lyndall then not only taking on the male role to satisfy their craving for power and autonomy, but also subjugating that giving female part of

themselves because of the suffering to which that has exposed them as sensitive, independent women? In her dealings with the unmanly Henry Blair Undine does away with the 'infinite patience and generosity and compassion' of the virtuous heroine and instead makes him suffer as she has done for her queerness and unwomanliness. Yet faced with the sick English digger at the end of the novel she reverts to the feminine qualities of caring and giving. Like Baby Bertie and Em she finds fulfilment in having "something to take care of"; (132) even though her sacrifices for the man lead ultimately to her own death.

Significantly, the only women in the novel for whom Undine feels some affinity are Alice Brown, Albert's ex-mistress, and the woman on board ship, whose love for a married man has ruined her life. Alice, a strong woman who has defied convention and borne an illegitimate child, is driven to suicide. Undine recognizes in her

the deep love of years, giving all things, denying nothing, pouring itself out at the feet of that stern strong man to whom it was only a thing to be used, drawn upon, and, when no longer needed, trodden on and forgotten. (133)

Undine's fellow-passenger on the ship to Africa describes a familiar attraction to her employer, a strong, potentially destructive man:

I was so afraid of him, I wondered how anyone could love him, till one day when I saw him sitting there with his little girl on his knee. Her head was on his shoulder and both his arms were about her, and he looked down at her with such a look in his face, and he was so strong, that I ran away to my room that the children might not see me. For I could not help crying; I wished so I was that little girl. (134)

Doubtless Olive poured many of her ambivalent feelings about her mother into this first work of late adolescence, and those cries for protection of the abandoned 'little girl' must reflect the sense of motherlessness which stayed with her for life. As a governess herself she had experienced sexual attraction towards an employer (135), and like Undine she was a secret writer, battling with "bits of blue paper, scribbled over and

blotted" which "lifted her up to heaven" (136) when she had the emotional and creative energy to involve herself in the writing process.

In writing Undine Schreiner seems to have been already remarkably aware of the complexity of her role in life as a woman artist. The novel is imbued with a scorn and dislike of women and a fear and envy of men, fluctuating wildly between feelings of submission and aggression, acceptance and revolt. The emotions are often crudely expressed through the characterisation - Henry Blair is a ragged sketch for the more developed and subtly-coloured portrait of Gregory Rose, and Undine herself has little of the strength or credibility of Lyndall and Rebekah. But the complex pattern of response to the socially conditioned roles of male and female, and the answering elements of masculine and feminine within Schreiner herself is firmly established as the central questing theme of her writing and her life.

I could not leave this chapter on sex and gender without looking finally at two of the three stories which make up Dream life and Real life. Both examine, through the finely-honed prose characteristic of her stories and allegories, the relationships of women to each other, to men and to themselves.

'The Policy in Favour of Protection' is concerned with the jealous, all-consuming love of a young woman for an older man, a celebrated writer, and the advice and help she gets from an older woman, herself an author, and loved by the man. The older woman is undoubtedly Schreiner herself; in a state of indecision she is seen to walk up and down "till the drops stood on her forehead", (137) and after a long speech on the meaning of marriage as a life-long partnership she "drew her breath heavily". (138) She voices Schreiner's own feelings about love and work, speaking of times



of inner struggle, "when everything seems dark, when the brain reels", (139) when "you have had a dream of what life ought to be, and you try to make it real, and you fail, when you doubt all you have lived for, and the ground seems washing out under your feet". (140)

Ironically the young woman can see her only as a public figure, an artist, detached from the emotional turmoil she herself is experiencing:

You, who are so great, and strong, and clever, and who care only for your work, and for men as your friends, you cannot understand what it is when one person is everything to you, when there is nothing else in the world! (141)

She remains unaware that this woman to whom she turns is involved with the man she loves, and will magnanimously sever her ties with him in order to give her the chance of his love.

With her repeated cry of "it is such a terrible thing to be a woman" the younger woman voices the helplessness of the Victorian female, 'to be able to do nothing and say nothing', (142) forced into a role of submissive 'seeming' in which, as another of Schreiner's trapped women explains, "you must wait, crush out, kill, in yourself". (143) The boundaries of correct behaviour are starkly outlined: "A woman knows what she can do." (144) Subterfuge and manipulation must be her means of communication; as Schreiner stated in another short story, 'The Buddhist Priest's Wife', a proper woman "should never show what she feels ... she must always go with her arms folded sexually". (145) 'You won't tell him exactly that I love him?' demands the younger of the older anxiously. 'That's the thing that makes a man hate a woman, if you tell it him plainly.' (146)

The older woman, however, has been used to plainness and honesty in her dealings with men, treating them "as friends" and equals as Schreiner strived to do. And, as Schreiner found, this could result in a frustrating denial of sexual feelings, and a sense of alienation from oneself and

others. The older woman's passion is hinted at subtly in the spare prose. When the other woman returns two months later with the news of the man's marriage to a young, beautiful and wealthy woman, her grief is melodramatically effusive, her jealousy increased as she thinks of the children this woman will bear him. The older woman is seen to be deeply moved by this thought, expressed in her restless action.

The elder woman moved quickly. 'One wants to have the child, and lay its head on one's breast and feed it.' She moved quickly. 'It would not matter if another woman bore it, if one had it to take care of.' She moved restlessly. (147)

Her writing is seen as compensation for her lack of a relationship with a man and the fulfilment of child bearing. "There are other things to live for", (148) but we learn that work too has failed her, that the time when 'you doubt all you have lived for' has come to her. The self-absorbed, naive younger woman, who sees her still as resilient, generous, "so good and great" (149), cannot feel her sorrow, and the woman's utter aloneness with her loss of both love and work is starkly depicted:

The younger woman went; and the elder knelt down by the chair, and wailed like a little child when you have struck it and it does not dare to cry loud. (150)

A year later she receives a letter from the young woman announcing her marriage to "the best, noblest, most large-hearted of men" and dismissing her former love as "only a girl's foolish dream". (151) From within the security of a partnership she can airily claim 'I don't hate that woman any more; I love everyone! .. I don't think now it is terrible to be a woman; it is lovely'. (152) Throwing the letter into the fire, her mouth "drawn in at the corners" (153) - with grim amusement, anger, sorrow? - the woman, alone, independent, loveless finishes the political article which gives the story its title, and gives her life continuing purpose and meaning.

'The Woman's Rose' also tells a tale of two women, but instead of the alienation and lack of understanding shown in 'The Policy..' it is a quiet celebration of sisterhood and women's friendship. Again women are seen as rivals in the marriage stakes, potentially jealous, competitive and possessive in love, but here Schreiner draws the two women together as equals. Although they exchange only a few words and a flower, the rose of the title, a sense of unspoken solidarity is established.

The story begins and ends with the picture of the rose kept treasured in a box, the scent of the withered flower symbolising for the writer the enduring nature of women's friendship. I must quote this strong and simple beginning for this is Schreiner's writing at its best, enriched with the experiences of womanhood, with feelings of relished privacy, of family, of precious mementos. Such writing conveys both the intimacy of a diary and the heightened awareness of a consciously crafted poem.

I have an old, brown, carved box; the lid is broken and tied with a string. In it I keep little squares of paper, with hair inside, and a little picture which hung over my brother's bed when we were children, and other things as small. I have in it a rose. Other women also have such boxes where they keep such trifles, but no one has my rose.

When my eye is dim, and my heart grows faint, and my faith in woman flickers, and her present is an agony to me, and her future a despair, the scent of that dead rose, withered for twelve years, comes back to me. I know there will be spring; as surely as the birds know it when they see above the snow two tiny, quivering green leaves. Spring cannot fail us. (154)

The directness of the opening lines is inviting. We see a particular old box; we are shown the personal, memory-evoking objects it contains. The woman links herself to a female tradition, to other women who 'also have such boxes', yet emphasizes her specialness, her unique possession - 'but no one has my rose'. The importance of the single rose for the woman raises questions, expectations, which are answered and met in the story that follows. Those 'other things as small' remind us of the contents of the

child Rebekah's old soap box which she gives as presents to her dead baby sister (155) - the odd stones, the brightly-coloured dead beetles, the little shop doll, the precious "head of Queen Victoria, cut out of the tinsel label of a sardine tin", the domestic workbox of needles, cotton and a silver thimble which also evoked childhood feelings for Em in African Farm. The woman Rebekah's study is similarly described, with loving attention to detail and a sense of the importance of woman's private, intimate places and things: (156) "Rebekah may not always make use of the room, just as she would not often draw out the old soap box from under her bed as a child; the important thing is, "she knew it was there; and there was always a quiet spot in her mind answering to it" (157).

The second paragraph reflects succinctly Schreiner's ambivalent personal feelings about women, the 'agony' of misunderstanding and suspicion she suffered at the hands of women - the "want of love and magnanimity" she talks of in the story's final lines (158) - and also the 'despair' she felt, both about the possibility of future sexual and political liberation, and of realising such equality in her own relationships with both women and men. But the rose, like the natural rhythm of the seasons from which Schreiner drew such delight, assures her of hope and the potential for joy.

Setting the scene for the familiar sense of man as Other in the small up-country town in which the young women of the story meet, the writer describes "other flowers in the box once",

a bunch of white acacia flowers, gathered by the strong hand of a man, as we passed down a village street on a sultry afternoon, when it had rained, and the drops fell on us from the leaves of the acacia trees. (159)

Once more the concision of word and image, the rhythm of the lines, feels more like poetry than prose. The woman has eventually thrown the flowers away, after they left damp mildew in her box. The 'strong hand' of the man who gave them to her, the 'sultry afternoon' it happened, the 'strong smell

of dried acacia' (160) which lingers still in the box seem oppressive, alien, as contrasted with the gentle memories evoked by the rose which she keeps. Evidently the man's meaning for her was dispensable, the woman's not.

The picture of the small African town with its population 'mainly of men' is seen as both claustrophobic and stimulating for the two young women who command the attention of the hungry males. The writer of the story arrives to find a young girl, a Baby Bertie/Em prototype - "fair", "fully-fleshed", "dreamy blue-eyes"; "wavy light-hair"; "full; rather heavy lips" and dimples - "reigning alone, "worshipped" by the men. (161) Their competitive adoration is observed by the newcomer with both understanding and detachment.

Partly, there was something noble and heroic in this devotion of men to the best woman they knew; partly there was something natural in it, that these men, shut off from the world, should pour at the feet of one woman the worship that otherwise would have been given to twenty; and partly there was something mean in their envy of one another. (162)

With the new arrival, "not as handsome" but "vital" and "new", (163) the men's object of worship changes. The writer tells honestly of her enjoyment of this new-found power and self-awareness, conscious in retrospect of her naivety:

I had lived alone all my life; no one ever had told me I was beautiful and a woman. I believed them. I did not know it was simply a fashion, which one man had set and the rest followed unreasoningly. I liked them to ask me to marry them, and to say No. I despised them. (164)

As an older woman looking back on this period of her life now, she reflects quietly that "the mother heart had not swelled in me yet; I did not know all men were my children, as the large woman knows when her heart is grown. I was too small to be tender". (165) It is a characteristic statement for Schreiner to make, always passionately sure that the "hunger for motherhood", as she called it in Woman and Labour, lay "deep and overmastering ... in

every virile woman's heart". (166) The very choice of words here reflects her equation of maternity with power, and the fulfilment of a need to both protect in a 'virile' way, and serve in that most womanly of roles. She wants to replace the small, hard self-absorption of childhood with the 'large' tenderness of the mature woman.

Here she portrays the selfishness of adolescence as the girl's ego is flattered, her sexuality aroused and she is prompted to childish cruelty:

I was like a child with a new whip, which it goes about cracking everywhere, not caring against what. I could not wind it up and put it away. Men were curious creatures, who liked me, I could never tell why. (167)

But her pleasure is tainted by the knowledge that the men have deserted the other woman for her: "I liked her great dreamy blue eyes, I liked her slow walk and drawl; when I saw her sitting among men, she seemed to me much too good to be among them ..." (168)

The women become, not rivals as would be socially 'normal' and as is half-expected by the writer - "I felt sure she hated me; that she wished I was dead" (169) - but silent associates, fellow conspirators, almost, drawn curiously together by their similar, detached relationships with the men and their strong awareness of each other:

If we met in the village street we bowed and passed on; when we shook hands we did so silently, and did not look at each other. But I thought she felt my presence in a room just as I felt hers. (170)

Their comradeship is finally overtly acknowledged at a party when the 'queen'-like, fair woman gives the dark one a rose, a special midwinter token from a man. Still, at this climactic moment, Schreiner keeps the prose restrained, the words to a minimum:

'How nice dark hair is; it sets off flowers so'. She stepped back and looked at me. 'It looks much better there!'

I turned round.

'You are so beautiful to me', I said.

'Y-e-s', she said, with her slow Colonial drawl; 'I'm so glad.'

We stood looking at each other. Then they came in and swept us away to dance. All the evening we did not come near to each other. Only once, as she passed she smiled at me.

The next morning I left the town.

I never saw her again. (171)

The feeling of the women for each other surmounts the moment, the action of the dance in which they are merely passive participants, the men anonymous partners in a meaningless charade: "They came in and swept us away". This treatment of the men is derisory without being cruel; they are seen throughout the story as thoughtless herd animals, obeying the instinct of the crowd, socially conditioned automatons, dancing in time to the accepted tune. The two women move in a world apart.

I have deliberately ended this chapter with such a positive portrayal of women, not rare in Schreiner's work but often overlooked. It is not difficult, and indeed it can be fascinating and revealing as I hope I have shown, to become enmeshed in Schreiner's fictional world of 'virile' women and 'unmanly' men, masterful heroes and self-sacrificing heroines. They tell us much about her inner 'disco-ordination', her sexual ambivalence, her passionate feelings of injustice and revolt. From this mass of contradictions, of opposites, of alternating hope and despair, can emerge the voice that so sensitively describes 'The Child's Day' in From Man to Man, that animates Lyndall's fervent speeches in African Farm, that speaks so powerfully of the struggle between the sexes in 'Three Dreams in a Desert'. It is the voice of the writer who inspired and encouraged the suffragettes as they read her allegories together in Holloway and of the woman who became for the women she was close to not simply a friend but also "a symbol, a seer, a teacher". (172)

Like both women in 'The Policy in Favour of Protection' she felt painfully much of the time that it was 'a very terrible thing to be a woman'; like the woman in 'The Woman's Rose' she could also appreciate and express the richness of female experience, and in so doing, inspire others.



CHAPTER IV 'INTO A LARGER ATMOSPHERE':  
THE LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF  
SCHREINER'S SPIRITUAL WORLD

Olive's early discovery of Emerson, recommended to her by Willie Bertram, the real-life model for Waldo's influential 'Stranger', marked a significant point in her life. Ellis has recorded in his notes that "it was at Cape Town that she bought Emerson... At that time she was peculiarly miserable and thinking of suicide. She remembers sitting by the window and the delight it gave her". (1) Not surprisingly, it was the essay 'Self-Reliance', with its emphasis on personal intuition, the quest for truth, and the upholding of individual principles, which became her favourite. She was excited to find her own emergent faith in a fundamental unity of life, and a love of nature, echoed in Emerson's writing. "She began to read, feeling: 'Here is what I have always thought.'" (2) She told Ellis that she would like that particular volume buried with her, feeling it to be "the expression of her highest self". "She always", noted Ellis, "turns to him in depression and he seems to take her into a larger atmosphere". (3)

Ellis' words capture Schreiner's early and recurring obsession with the details of her death, her search for her 'highest self' through writing - the work of others and her own, which, like Undine's could occasionally "lift her up to heaven" - and her constant longing for escape into the freedom of 'a larger atmosphere', a breathing space both physical and spiritual. Like Emerson she believed in recapturing the innocent openness of childhood, receptive to all experiences. "As one grows older", she confided to Carpenter, "one grows more and more shut up within oneself; and I think it causes a kind of spiritual congestion". (4) Such 'congestion' of the soul, a typical term for the asthmatic Olive to use, was often

stimulated and released in the larger atmosphere of the South African veld.

I wish you could go once to my old African world and know what it is to stand quite alone on a mountain in the still blazing sunshine and the clear, clear blue above you, and the great unbroken plains stretching away as far as you can see, without a trace of the human creature. Perhaps not a living creature higher in the scale than an ant within miles and miles of you ... then you would know how the One god was invented ... When one is in contact with that vast, dry, bright nature, one is conscious of oneself, of inanimate nature and of something else. It is this something else that has framed [sic. formed?] those religions in which there is one sole, almighty God. (5)

~~She possesses a highly-tuned awareness of this "something else", expressed~~ in her writing through a reaching out from the immediate and evocative descriptions of the Karroo, towards the unknown, the underlying "mystery and insolubility of things". (6)

In her study of literary women, Ellen Moers devotes an illuminating section to the importance of place and atmosphere in womens' writing, with particular reference to a sense of spiritual freedom. Of Willa Cather she writes, "To look at Cather's landscapes is to perceive not the woman in the writer so much as the mystic." (7) I would say the same could be said of Olive Schreiner and her Karroo. This mysticism took her above and beyond a concept of gender; at the same time it is a spirituality achieved through a particular response to landscape and the natural world which seems peculiar to women novelists and poets. I am thinking here of writers as diverse in style and background as Woolf, Kate Chopin, Mary Webb, Emily Dickinson and Emily Bronte as well as other white colonial women stimulated, like Schreiner, by the special beauty of Africa - Lessing, Karen Blixen, Sheila Fugard.

In this chapter my central concern is with an exploration of Schreiner's African landscapes and visions seen as a part of what Moers calls this "literature of female mysticism". (8) I shall concentrate mainly on African Farm and her stories and allegories, for in these the essence of her

spirituality is most palpable, but will also refer throughout to other texts. It is the mark of Schreiner's versatility and innovative literary techniques - not, as some critics would have it, a sign of structural incoherence and personal confusion - that her visionary faith is never far removed from her overtly political writing; it vitalises the utopian feminism of Woman and Labour and the subversive exposé of Rhodes' policies in Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland.

In her correspondence with the Reverend J. T. Lloyd, a clergyman of Port Elizabeth whom she greatly respected, Schreiner writes of her life-long belief in a unifying principle:

I have never been able to conceive of God and man and the material universe as distinct from one another. . . . When I was a little child of five and sat alone among the tall weeds at the back of our house, this perception of the unity of all things, and that they were alive, and that I was part of them, was as clear and overpowering to me as it is today. It is the one thing I am never able to doubt. (9)

Schreiner's consciousness of a spiritual dimension to her life was directly linked to her absorption in the material world, the smallest objects of which she would curiously collect, dissect and compare, and remained remarkably firm in an era of scientific and religious upheaval. Symonds' sense of paralysis, brought on "by the confusion round me, science and religion clashing, no creeds emergent", was a common response among the thinking men and women of the time.

The nervous fluids of our brains, instead of being concentrated upon single thoughts, are dispersed through a thousand channels. There is little productive energy, much .. real blindness and impotent drifting, on all sides. (10)

Certainly, Schreiner was exposed to such fragmentation of thought and belief when she came to Britain, and was to find it both stimulating and threatening. Kingsley's desperate words are interestingly close to Schreiner's own expression of failure and weakness, her recurring sense of stasis and emptiness:

I can't think; I can't write; I can't run; I can't ride - I have neither wit, nerve, nor strength for anything; and if I try I get a hot head, and my arms and legs begin to ache ... Oh life - life, life! Why do folks cling to this half existence, and call that life? (11)

Yet Schreiner's moments of similar doubt and hopelessness, the times which prompted her retreat to the convent at Harrow, or her sudden flights abroad, and her eventual return to Africa, stem more, as I hope I have previously demonstrated, from her experiences as a woman within a repressively patriarchal social system, rather than as an artist clinging to a sense of self and purpose within a rapidly changing intellectual milieu.

For Schreiner the 'new' knowledge and science of Spencer and Darwin, together with the transcendentalism of Goethe and Emerson, which showed "the interlocking lines of action and reaction which bind together all that we see and are conscious of", (12) served to positively reinforce that sense of unity she was aware of as a child of five, that "great, pulsating, always interacting whole". (13) The clash for Schreiner between the old ways of thinking and of seeing the world and the new was played out early in her childhood through the relationship with her parents. The confrontations with adult authority and the lonely spiritual questing of Undine and Waldo are directed not simply by the enquiring and mature mind which digested the major thinkers and writers of the epoch at an early age, but as much by the experiences of an impressionable girl growing up in the wild isolation of the Karroo, daughter of two very different but fervently religious people - a 'masculine'\* mother, self-contained and harshly disciplinarian, and a gentle, impractical and loving father.

The agony of my childhood, especially from the time I was nine till I was fourteen, was the impossibility of reconciling the direct perception, from which I could never shake myself free, with what I was taught. (14)

\* A conversation between Arthur Symons and Schreiner is noted in Cronwright-Schreiner's Life, in which Olive remarked: "My mother is just like a man - you know what I mean ..." The Life of Olive Schreiner, p.188.

This 'direct perception' of the world around her and her own individualised, questioning reading of the Bible, brought her into early conflict with her mother, whose failure to understand, or respond positively to, her rebellious daughter was a constant source of heartbreak for the young Olive. Her feelings about religion were consequently mixed with a deep-rooted sense of rejection and guilt and an inclination towards self-punishment which stayed with her throughout her life.

The difficult process of breaking free from her childhood experience of a stern, vengeful God and the deeply imbued sense of sin with which Rebecca Schreiner brought up all her children, was furthered by her sister Ellie's death: "It was impossible for me then, as it is impossible for me now, to accept the ordinary doctrine that she was living somewhere without a body." This early and traumatic acquaintance with death convinced the young Olive that it was in "a larger doctrine" that "joy and beauty must be sought". (15) From the confines of the repressive family faith, with its narrow dogmas of orthodox Christian teaching, she reached out towards a pantheistic vision of the universe which was inspired by her moments of solitude and personal peace in the Karroo. It was expressly through the writing process that she attempted to give voice to the many-layered consciousness of life; she struggled with her work, as Waldo does with his carving, to make it 'suggest' "the whole of the story", the "attribute of all true art" being "that it says more than it says, and takes you away from itself". (16) Waldo's Stranger voices Schreiner's own yearning towards a 'larger atmosphere', a working from within to without through the "little door" of individual artistic expression which can open "into an infinite hall where you find what you please .. There is nothing so universally intelligible as truth. It has a thousand meanings, and suggests a thousand more". (17)

"I cannot stop in the thought of 'God' as the father of men, and men as brothers, I have to go further", Olive explained urgently to the Reverend Lloyd.

If I say that in a stone in the wood, in the thought of my brain, in the corpuscles of a drop of blood under my microscope, in a railway engine rushing past me in the veld, I see God, shall I not be darkening counsel with words? If I say that when I nurse a man with smallpox I am touching something far other than what seems to be lying there; if I say that when I go into the prison to see a prisoner I simply go to see myself; if I say that when I go out among the rocks alone I am not alone, have I made anything clearer? (18)

In virtually everything she wrote Schreiner's striving to clarify, both for herself and her readers, that "There is NOTHING but God", is a recurring preoccupation. At the same time her own bitter attempts to connect this all-embracing faith with her personal and political fight for freedom within the divisive societies of South Africa and Victorian England fostered a darker awareness of spiritual isolation, a frequent feeling that

where one soul stands, never has stood, and never shall stand, another, but that each man's life and struggle is a mystery incomprehensible and forever hid from every heart but his own. (19)

As an external reflection of "that solitary land of the individual experience" the natural world can appear hostile, with an alien, unrecognisable force of its own, at odds with the artist's attempts to realise a pattern and meaning to life. Her African landscape can inspire both a sense of empathetic wonder and lonely fear.

Jean Marquard, in a sensitive appraisal of African Farm, writes that

the contours of Schreiner's world are those of a desert, the physical desert of the Karroo and metaphorically, the arid and stricken place voyaged, traditionally in poetry, by the seeker of new truths. Her conception of the desert as metaphor contains and synchronises her diffuse narrative method. (20)

Schreiner's varied responses to her environment and her own religious doubts and beliefs encouraged that sense of 'having to go further', giving an exploratory edge to her writing, with its daringly 'diffuse narrative method'.

no doubt inspired by the pioneering society in which she grew up as much as by her personal quest for spiritual wholeness. Aptly then, Lessing describes African Farm as being one of "that small number of novels" (she cites Moby Dick, Jude the Obscure, and that favourite parallel to Schreiner's work, Wuthering Heights) which is "on a frontier of the human mind". (21) The novel faithfully for her evokes the real Africa, "Africa the magnificent - mine, and everyone's who knows Africa" as it "wrestles on the edge of understanding" with at its heart "an endeavour, a kind of hunger, that passionate desire for growth and understanding, which is the deepest pulse of human beings". (22)

Schreiner's final choice of such a - literally - down-to-earth title for the book is a pertinent one. She had at one time intended to call it "Mirage" with the addition of a motto, "Life is a series of abortions", but changed it when she discovered another with that title. She also felt, according to Ellis, that the motto "revealed the tendency of the book too plainly". (23) The 'tendency' of the novel is in fact immediately revealed in the opening section entitled 'Shadows from Child-Life' with its three sub-sections, 'The Watch', 'The Sacrifice', and 'The Confession', concentrating on the boy Waldo's aching desire for and agonised rejection of God. The shadowy, mirage-like qualities of the book's plot and characters were clearly meant by the author to be an intrinsic part of her portrayal of "the life we all lead" (see the Preface), a perplexingly abortive, haphazard performance. Like Virginia Woolf's Bernard, in The Waves, she was acutely aware that the individual is "not one and simple, but complex and many", (24) formed, as she explains through the de Tocqueville quotation which starts the novel, by the "images" and "words" which "the external world casts upon the dark mirror of his mind". Like Woolf she attempted to convey "the sense of the complexity and the reality and the struggle" (25) of life through the 'diffuse narrative method' of her writing.

Numerous reviewers have criticised the novel's structure, or rather, lack of it. In the same voice they have enthused about its 'atmosphere' (26), seemingly unaware that the framework, this "hotch-potch of farce, poetic allegory and realistic description" (27) as Laurence Lerner puts it, this very experimental formlessness - which Robert Green has gone so far as to liken to the "absurd and incomplete" dramatic world of Beckett (28) - is instrumental in lending the book the psychic and physical space in which such an atmosphere of spiritual consciousness is fostered. If we consider that "The Story of an African Farm", with its emphasis on setting and realism, and "Mirage", with its connotations of unreality and vision, were inter-changeable titles for the novel, we can appreciate to what extent the two, the literal and the metaphoric, are fused in the whole work itself.

In a letter to Mrs. Mary King Roberts from Cape Town in 1889, Schreiner describes a particular experience of a Karroo mirage, evidently a phenomenon she has encountered before:

I've travelled nearly three thousand miles since I came to this country all through the Karroo and saw a beautiful mirage one day, a finer one than I've ever seen before even in my long experience. It was on a vast desert plain about midday, and there far off on the horizon was a beautiful lake with trees all round it, the water dancing. I never saw the lake of Geneva more clearly and exactly. Yet within hundreds of miles there was no lake and probably within a hundred miles nothing but a little pool of water a few feet square in the dried bed of the river ... (29)

Interestingly, Karen Blixen, in Out of Africa, talks also of mirages as being an intrinsic part of the African atmosphere.

The air in Africa is more significant in the landscape than in Europe, it is filled with loomings and mirages, and is in a way the real stage of activities. In the heat of midday the air oscillates and vibrates like the string of a violin, lifts up long layers of grassland with thorn-trees and hills on it and creates vast silvery expanses of water in the dry grass. (30)

Like Schreiner, Blixen evokes the elemental mysteriousness of her African world, in which the very air encourages a different perception of reality, becomes 'the real stage of activities'.



Reviewers, past and present, have justly celebrated the forceful realism of Schreiner's veld pictures - pioneering proof to later South African writers, as Cherry Clayton points out, that "the barest parts of the country were literarily viable; milkbushes and mimosas could be the stuff of the imagination". (31) "One is tempted to say the main character of the book is neither Lyndall, nor Waldo, but the farm itself", writes Uys Krige (32), and it is undeniably true that the kopje-punctuated Karroo, the prickly-pears, the kraals and the farm buildings themselves which seem to grow naturally out of this hard, red, ancient desert territory are often more vividly realized than the characters who, confusingly appearing and disappearing, enact that strange coming and going of feet. Through their very solid permanence and intrusive presence in the novel, the farm and landscape become, as Robert Green has remarked, its narrative as well as its physical 'base'. (33) However, the relationship between Waldo and Lyndall and their environment is a more fluid one than Green's interpretation suggests, a relationship illustrated by the movingly understated and ambiguous scene with which the novel closes: Waldo's almost imperceptible death, a mere slipping from one state to another, as his individuality merges into the backdrop of the Karroo, and we see him simply as an inanimate perch for the chickens, his "brother spirits". A closer examination of the opening sections of the novel in which Schreiner establishes the interconnectedness of individual and environment, and the importance of landscape as setting and symbol throughout the novel, will demonstrate the ease with which she moves between her inner and outer worlds.

"The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain." So opens the novel. In two bold, descriptive paragraphs Schreiner sets the scene for her story. Here we see the farm by night, part of a dramatically moon-lit, almost stagey landscape in which milk-bush, kopje and outbuilding glimmer in a "kind of dreamy beauty" under

the startlingly "blue" sky of a clear African night. Here the vegetation takes on an eerily human appearance, as milk-bushes raise their "long, finger-like leaves" and prickly-pears lift "their thorny arms", reflecting the moonlight "on their broad fleshy leaves". The scene has a surreal quality, the moonlight transforming all objects on the plain with a "weird", "almost oppressive" beauty. A plain, low brick wall in front of the farmhouse is "quite etherealized", the zinc "ribs" of the outbuilding roofs illuminated with a "quite peculiar brightness". (34)

The following short sub-chapter opens with a similar directness of tone: "The farm by daylight was not as the farm by moonlight." Again the varied surfaces of the farm buildings are seen to mirror an all-pervasive light, but this time it is that of the "fierce" sun, mercilessly revealing the barrenness of the plain; a "weary flat of loose red sand"; "sparsely" dotted with shrivelled bushes "that cracked beneath the tread like tinder". In this light eyes "ache" and "blench", ants and beetles run about madly in the "blazing sand", cicada-like insects cry aloud and two sunflowers droop defeated, their "brazen faces" "outstared" by the sun. (35) The repeated phrases "by daylight" and "seen by daylight" echo the relentless beating down of this African sun, and emphasize the change in appearance of both farm and inhabitants. The grotesque form of Tant' Sannie, whom we first see rolling and snorting in an indigestion-disturbed sleep is "even less lovely" in the harsh light of day, solid, swearing, and wiping her "flat face" with her apron. Em's freckled features are simply those of a plain little girl, no longer the somewhat sentimentalized "innocent face of a child in its first sweet sleep". Old Otto, the overseer, is transformed from the prophet-like figure with "great arms folded" and "bushy grey-and-black beard rising and falling on his breast" into "a huge German", "wearing a shabby suit, and with a childish habit of rubbing his hands and nodding his head prodigiously when pleased at anything". Waldo, with his

"silky black curls and two black eyes" staring thoughtfully into the darkness and brooding over issues of life and death, becomes in daylight "a small and dusty herd", "powdered all over from head to foot with red sand, wearing a ragged coat, and shoes of undressed leather, through whose holes the toes looked out". Significantly, it is only Lyndall, the headstrong, independent heroine who never seems quite to belong to this farm, rather to a different place and time, whose "elfin-like beauty" remains constant.

With these two sharply contrasting pictures of her farm locality, Schreiner establishes her novel's 'mirage'-like atmosphere, introducing straight away the shifting plains/planes of reality and vision, the worlds of the labourer and the dreamer, in which Waldo, the dirty, inarticulate shepherd-pursues his quest for a sense of meaning in life.

Both by day and by night in this opening section of the novel we see Waldo's childhood suffering, his "intense loneliness", "intense ignorance" (36), unrelieved by his physical surroundings. Although as a dusty farm labourer he appears at home "under a shelving rock" on his stomach like a lizard of the veld, the agony of his spiritual suffering seems, in fact, to be highlighted by the "almost oppressive" beauty of the night in which he counts the ticking of the watch and worries over the injustice of a religious system which condemns unbelievers to eternal darkness after death. Unlike Undine, in an identical childhood scene in that first novel, Waldo does not find a calming consolation in the moonlit Karroo outside, "through that subtle sympathy which binds together all things". (37) After his testing of his personal God through a sacrificial offering which goes unrecognized, the very landscape seems to mock him, reflecting his cold sense of rejection. The leaves of the prickly pear "glinted, and glinted, and glinted, just like his own heart - cold, so hard, and very wicked". As he dares to

voice his hatred of the God who has deserted him "the wind took the words and ran away with them, among the stones, and through the leaves of the prickly pear". (38)

By day, before this sacrifice, as the sun's rays pour down "vertically", and the earth throbs before the eye he gazes with eyes "heavy" from sleep at the "far-off hills" which seem to inspire and encourage him:

'Ye shall receive - ye shall receive - shall, shall, shall'  
he muttered.

He sat up then. Slowly the dullness and heaviness melted  
from his face; it became radiant. (39)

These "far-off hills" are surely those same "far-off blue and purple mountains" which prompt Rebekah's "vague, insatiable hunger" (40) for some higher plane of existence in From Man to Man. It is a "blue mountain, far away" to which Lyndall asks to be taken before she dies, which when reached is no longer blue, "but low and brown, covered with long waving grasses and rough stones". (41) They are both real, a visible feature of the landscape, and mirage-like, not what they seem, symbolic of the distance to be travelled by the individual reaching towards the Ideal.

The stages of Waldo's spiritual development are traced within the disconcerting temporal structure of the novel. Running counter to the steady ticking of his father's watch and, correspondingly, a rigid Christian belief in salvation or damnation, are the "seasons" of the "soul's life" and the inner growth of individual faith; "periods not found in any calendar, times that years and months will not scan, but which are as deftly and sharply cut off from one another as the smoothly-arranged years which the earth's motion yields us". (42) Throughout the novel we are made aware of these two time scales. Schreiner, almost incidentally it seems, mentions the passage of years at various points in the narrative; it is "two years after" his sacrifice on a home-made altar of stones that Waldo's

'confession' on a lonely kopje takes place, this within the first few pages of the story. Immediately after that a specific year is mentioned, 1862, "the year of the great drought", and again we are aware of the passing of time as we see Lyndall and Em "somewhat grown since the days when they played hide-and-peek". (43) The unchanging routine of a traditional Boer homestead goes on in the background. Lyndall returns home after an undescribed absence of "four years" to find familiar objects unchanged: "the candle standing on the dressing-table still cast the shadow of an old crone's head in the corner beyond the clothes-horse. Strange that even a shadow should last longer than man". (44) The farm itself, and the black servants, who seem as much a part of the natural setting as the Karroo bushes and kopjes, a reflection of Schreiner's Darwinistic and limited perception of race relations remain impervious to the lives and deaths of its inhabitants, directly influenced only by each passing season:

... day after day, month after month, the water in the dams fell lower and lower; the sheep died in the fields; the cattle, scarcely able to crawl, tottered as they moved from spot to spot in search of food. Week after week, month after month, the sun looked down from the cloudless sky, till the karroo-bushes were leafless sticks, broken into the earth, and the earth itself was naked and bare; and only the milk-bushes, like old hags, pointed their shrivelled fingers heaven words, praying for the rain that never came ... (45)

Again the vivid picture of such an arid, life-destroying landscape is an oppressive one. The continual references to the same features - the dominating sun, the dusty earth, the dry bushes - reinforce the claustrophobic atmosphere of the farm on which the three children are subject to the senseless cruelty of Bonaparte Blenkins and the stupid insensitivity of Tant' Sannie; on which Boer and Black survive in an uneasy and unequal relationship of deceit and mockery; and on which the innocent goodness of Old Otto is wiped out and buried with disrespectful haste in the blazing heat.

It is this overwhelmingly hostile and seemingly limited environment which drives Lyndall and Waldo in turn away from the farm in search of 'a larger atmosphere' of individual freedom only to discover, as Jean Marquard points out, that "you do not escape the desert - you take it with you". (46) When Waldo takes time off from his temporary job at a wholesale store, work of soul-destroying drudgery ("My work was to pack and unpack goods, and to carry boxes, and I had only to work from six in the morning till six in the evening; so I had plenty of time",... (47)) he goes in search of the sea... of his boyhood dreams:

.. a little after sunrise I got to the top of a high hill. Before me was a long, low, blue monotonous mountain. I walked looking at it; but I was thinking of the sea. I had wanted to see... At last I wondered what that curious blue thing might be; then it struck me it was the sea!... When I was a little boy, minding sheep behind the 'kopje'; I used to see the waves stretching out as far as the eye could reach in the sunlight. My sea! Is the ideal always more beautiful than the real? (48)

Again, the theme of disillusionment and a waking up to reality; Waldo is 'looking' without really 'seeing', thinking only of the ideal sea of his dreams. Yet gradually a sense of communication occurs as he spends time on the beach. He recognises in the restless movement of the waves an element of himself:

it is always wanting, wanting, wanting. It hurries on; and then it creeps back slowly without having reached, moaning. It is always asking a question, and it never gets an answer. I can hear it in the day and in the night; the white foam breakers are saying that which I think. (49)

Once more Schreiner anticipates Woolf's consciousness of the ebb and flow of human experience:

Sitting alone, it seems we are spent; our waters can only just surround feebly that spike of sea-holly; we cannot reach that further pebble so as to wet it. It is over, we are ended. But wait .. an impulse again runs through us; we rise, we toss back a mane of white spray; we pound on the shore; we are not to be confined. (50)

This dominant theme of the novel, this "wanting" and questioning and "striving", which pulses through the sea, through Waldo, through the small

black dung-bettle in the sand of the Karroo, was for Schreiner the central code of life. "Perhaps it is through this hunger that the race grows"; she wrote to Carpenter; "it drives on and on to seek a somewhat better [future] than we ever can reach. But so we keep growing ..." (51) If the Ideal, like the allegorical hunter's bird of Truth, is unreachable it is nevertheless suggested in the parts of the whole, in the single white feathers falling to each 'hunter', in the identification of Waldo with sea and beetle.

Part of the central section of the novel, "Times and Seasons", is suspended in time in the narrative as if between brackets; it begins with a picture of Waldo lying on his stomach in the sand, and he is still there at the start of the following chapter when he meets his Stranger. Through references back to scenes in Waldo's childhood; to her own experiences, and by drawing the reader into the weaving of memory and motif with the confident use of 'we', Schreiner charts the growth of a human mind/soul through its various "seasons". She follows the gradual coming to terms with the complexities of reality through stages of heightened sensual awareness and the dawning of self-consciousness, through inner questioning and doubting processes and rejection of God, to arrive at an eventual perception of that unifying "hunger" and underlying pattern. There is a sudden, all-embracing understanding. The "delicate network of blood-vessels" in a dead gander, "standing out red against the faint blue background" calls to mind the outline of a thorn tree, "seen against the sky in midwinter".

.. of that shape also is delicate metallic tracery between our rocks; in that exact path does our water flow when without a furrow we lead it from the dam; so shaped are the antlers of the horned beetle ...

This thing we call existence; is it not a something which has its roots far down below in the dark, and its branches stretching out into the immensity above, which we among the branches cannot see? Not a chance jumble; a living thing, a One .. (52)

The final chapter of the novel is redolent with a warm appreciation of such 'moments of being', of occasional entry into that inner "land where the soul, gazing long, loses all consciousness of its little self, and almost feels its hand on the old mystery of Universal Unity that surrounds it". (53) We see the landscape transformed by heavy rains, a verdant reflection of Waldo's inner sense of enrichment: "he never looked out across the plain. He was conscious without looking of that broad green earth; it made his work pleasant to him." (54) The sleepy atmosphere of the farm at the end of a long hot afternoon is conducive to one of Waldo's "old dreaming fits":

Among the flowers the white butterflies hovered, and on the old 'kraal' mounds three white kids gambolled, and at the door of one of the huts an old grey-headed Kaffir woman sat on the ground mending her mats. A balmy, restful, peacefulness seemed to reign everywhere. Waldo looked at it all and smiled. An evil world, a deceitful, treacherous mirage-like world it might be; but a lovely world for all that. (55)

Waldo's reflection that "there will always be something worth living for while there are shimmery afternoons" (56) acknowledges the fine tension Schreiner has created in this novel between the individuals striving towards an integrated state of being, a harmonious co-existence of all living things mirrored in the natural pattern of the external world, and the awareness that this must ultimately remain a 'shimmery' utopian vision. Through her use of the Karroo she knew intimately in all moods as both setting and symbol she found a potent method of making her 'story' of an African Farm 'say more than it says, and take you away from itself'.

With the stories of Lyndall and Waldo, Schreiner seems to be trying to bring two strands of her identity, the political and spiritual, together. She attempts to solve the dilemma of being, at one and the same time, a woman, in conflict with a world which denies the specifically female experience - where to be "born a woman" is to "be born branded" (57) and



an androgynous soul/spirit/inner self, in harmony with the larger, more elemental, unifying force of the universe. Although Gregory Rose is commonly identified as the androgynous figure in the novel it is a consciously engineered androgyny through which Schreiner makes us constantly aware of what 'male' and 'female' mean in society. Waldo's gender, on the other hand, always seems peculiarly insignificant. For Lyndall it must mean an inevitable rift between them both - "I'm sorry you don't care for the position of women; I should have liked us to be friends" (58) - yet Waldo is seen to be much further apart from the other male characters than from her, notably from the sophisticated and cynical Stranger, and from the vulgar clerk in the shop where he works temporarily whose fondness for popular sexist romances Waldo finds incomprehensible and repellent. "It made me feel as if I were having a bad dream, and I wanted to be far away." (59) Waldo's asexuality is part of his childlike openness to experience; he remains unencumbered by a consciousness of sex in his relationship with the external world.

In her study of women writers' spirituality, Diving Deep and Surfacing, Carol P. Christ identifies two dimensions of women's struggle: the 'spiritual' and the 'social' quest. The latter concerns "women's struggle to gain respect, equality, and freedom in society - in work, in politics, and in relationships"; the former is a "woman's awakening to the depths of her soul and her position in the universe". (60) She feels it is important for women "to become aware of the ways in which spirituality can support and undergird women's quest for social equality". (61) This interaction of the two was the basis of Schreiner's dream of a future world; in the present of her 'Story' it is as far off, as idealised, as Lyndall's blue mountain.

Only in death does Lyndall find something to 'free her from herself'. "something great and pure" (62) to take over and calm her warring,

questioning spirit. For Schreiner's struggling feminists, death is seen as an equalising force, an escape from the life-long confines of gender.

As the woman in 'The Buddhist Priest's Wife' puts it:

Death means so much more to a woman than a man; when you knew you were dying, to look round on the world and feel the bond of sex that has broken and crushed you all your life has gone, nothing but the human left, no woman any more, to meet everything on perfectly even ground. (63)

In letters to Karl Pearson from the sanctuary of the Harrow Convent, Schreiner wrote enviously of the "wonderful, credulous, dreamy, child-like, happy, timorous spirit" of the nuns (64) in whose "peaceful and dead" faces (65) she could see a liberation from the problems of sex and gender which were uppermost in her mind at the time.

Waldo's death, a merging with the natural cycle of the universe, can also be seen in terms of a retreat, an avoidance of the complexities and conflict of life, in which true communication with one's fellow human beings seems impossible:

Well to die then; for, if you live, so surely as the years come, so surely as the spring succeeds <sup>the</sup> winter, so surely will passions arise. They will creep back, one by one, into the bosom that has cast them forth, and fasten there again, and peace will go. Desire, ambition, and the fierce agonizing flood of love for the living - they will spring again ... (66)

The ambiguities inherent in Schreiner's development of Lyndall, Waldo, and Gregory Rose, and their final destinies of death and loneliness, have led First and Scott to conclude that the novel is that "imaginative experiment which was both retreat and liberation", (67) retreat from an ultimate bringing together of the social and spiritual quests, yet liberation through her very creation of the Story's "compelling world of possibility" (68) - a world in which women actively reject social conventions, gender barriers can be crossed, and the wholeness of the Universe revealed in transcendental 'moments of being'.

An interesting parallel can be made with another nineteenth century study of woman's search for sexual and psychic freedom, Kate Chopin's The Awakening. Edna Pontellier's suicide by drowning provokes the same controversy as Schreiner's Story, and can be seen in terms of both a retreat and a rebirth. Like Waldo, Edna achieves a sense of communication with her inner self and the universe through her experience of the sea, the medium of her 'awakening' which is both spiritual and physical. Like Lyndall her raised consciousness inspires a hunger for further knowledge and adventure: "She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before." (69) Yet her 'awakening' leads to suicide. Carol P. Christ sees Edna's death as reflecting "spiritual triumph but social defeat": (70) By choosing death, Edna is admitting that "she cannot find a way to translate her spiritual awareness of her freedom and infinite possibilities into life and relationships with others". (71) By choosing death for Lyndall and Waldo, seekers of sexual and spiritual liberation, Schreiner reveals the same dilemma.

This dilemma, which has been seen by some critics like Elaine Showalter, as a peculiarly Victorian problem, (72) is still very much in the consciousness of feminist writers today. Novelists and poets, such as Doris Lessing and Adrienne Rich, have grappled creatively with the split between their political and spiritual selves and have been able to bring the two together by realising, like Schreiner, 'compelling worlds of possibility' through their imaginative writing. I shall explore these connections more fully in the following chapter.

However, it was interesting to discover recently a woman giving voice to thoughts about self, sexuality and spirituality which are remarkably similar to Schreiner's, but a whole century on. Like Schreiner, Michele Roberts became a writer "through sheer necessity", an inner compulsion:

I desperately needed to describe experience in order not to be overwhelmed by it, to name the conflicts inside myself, to imagine solutions to them, to create images and meanings of femininity that were not divisive, damaging, silencing ... (73)

Like Schreiner she found in her faith a welcome escape into a genderless space where 'God' was "pure spirit, unsexed, the lack of gender felt comfortable". (74) She admits to problems with her own sexuality and consequently with her relationship with her mother:

I .. could not and did not want to identify with my mother as a feminine being. Puberty, which marked me as female in a way I'd never had to face before, was a terrible shock, destroying my androgynous self-image and identification with plants and animals and reducing me to an identity that was partial, negative, and terrifying, because it pointed me towards a certain and limiting fate; I felt that freedom and choice were removed from women. (75)

Like Schreiner, she identifies childhood as a time of unselfconscious communication with the natural world:

I rarely felt separate from it. My skin, the boundary between me and trees, clouds, rocks, seemed easily to dissolve, and I only knew that I was human and different when I found myself crying at things that were so beautiful they were almost painful: electric blue twilights, the stars, the sea. These experiences diminished as I grew older and built up defences against feeling. (76)

[compare with Schreiner's 'internal spiritual congestion' as one grows older.]

The same 'almost painful' awareness of another level of being is experienced by Lessing's heroine, Martha Quest, as, walking alone on the African veld, she feels herself immersed in a mystical communion with the environment:

There was a slow integration during which she, and the little animals, and the moving grasses, and the sunwarmed trees, and the slopes of shivering silvery mealies, and the great dome of blue light overhead, and the stones of earth under her feet, became one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms. (77)

This sense of unity with all around her, the sudden humility and loss of self with her recognition of her "smallness, the unimportance of humanity" (78), are feelings we find frequently articulated in Schreiner's writing. In her description of Martha's changing planes of consciousness, Lessing uses

terms of forgetfulness and memory, pain and joy, a sense of striving towards something, and a rebirth, which are all common features of Schreiner's movement between dream and reality in African Farm, and form the processes she employs in her Dreams, and Stories and Allegories to explore the world of the spirit.

Suddenly the feeling in Martha deepened, and as it did so she knew she had forgotten, as always, that what she had been waiting for like a revelation was a pain, not a happiness; what she remembered, always, was the exaltation and the achievement, what she forgot was this difficult birth into a state of mind ...

There was certainly a definite point at which the thing began. It was not; then it was suddenly inescapable

But it did not last; the force desisted, and left her standing on the road, already trying to reach out after 'the moment' so that she might retain its message from the wasting and creating chaos of darkness... Already the thing was sliding backwards, becoming a whole in her mind, instead of a process; the memory was changing so that it was with nostalgia that she longed 'to try again' ... (79)

In these descriptive passages of Martha's intimation of a new - or rather, re-covered, recognized - order of things, Lessing explores three characteristics of spiritual 'awakening' which are the basis of Schreiner's 'Dreams': the importance of the external world and the beauty of the veld through her experience of which Martha enters into spiritual re-searching; the dream-like, uncontrollable nature of the revelation itself which flashes upon Martha - 'it was not; then it was suddenly inescapable', it quickly 'slides' backwards, 'becoming a whole .. instead of a process', 'changing' rapidly; and, at the same time; the sense of effort involved in this movement from the physical to the psychic plane, the 'pain', the 'achievement', the 'difficult birth into a state of mind' which Martha soon longs to repeat; recapture, 'to try again'.

For me the most effective and enduring of Schreiner's Dreams are those that start not from some vaguely allegorical territory of the mind - the "certain valleys" of 'The Hunter', the place "where the sunlight played

on the sea-shore" ('The Lost Joy'), the "world in one of the far-off stars" ('In a Far-Off World') - but the ones which begin rooted in Schreiner's vividly yet sparsely described Africa, Alassio, or London: the mimosa tree, brown earth and throbbing air of 'Three Dreams in a Desert', the "four bare walls", plaster peeling, of the Italian chapel standing on a rocky promontory surrounded by olive trees with "their black berries and pale-green leaves" against the "blue, blue Italian sky" ('In a Ruined Chapel'); the policeman's feet, beating the pavement, the rolling of carriage wheels, the sudden woman's laugh in the London street outside the sleeper's window in 'The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed'.

The dreams themselves are parables, occasionally verging on a pious sentimentality in which Schreiner reflects the worst of the late Victorian taste for morally educative tales, but at their best illustrating, with a fresh, uncluttered simplicity, Schreiner's hopeful vision of a future world. Written, as First and Scott point out (80), at one of the darkest points in her personal life, Olive's 'Dreams' provided an escape, "a way of freeing herself .. 'Dreaming' was a way of transcending pain and fictionalizing her experience". (81)

Preoccupied with the vicissitudes of a contingent world, she sought their resolution in a series of transformations: from exploitation and oppression to goodness, repentance, union, and bliss. (82)

A modern parallel to Schreiner's use of this popular allegorical form and her working towards a feminist/Utopian vision through it could perhaps be seen in the recent emergence of feminist science-fiction in which women writers today are using a traditionally male form of fiction to creatively explore issues of sex and gender.

".. except in my own language of parables I cannot express myself", wrote Schreiner to the Reverend Lloyd. (83) Certainly she seems to have found in her use of allegory an ease and fluidity of writing which she

seldom experienced with the novels. To my mind, however, the novels, with their complex structures, inherent ambivalence and obvious struggle to realise in prose the workings of the inner life are more satisfying than most of Schreiner's dreams and allegories which can appear too glib, too simplistic. Yet some do stand out still as fine, assured pieces of poetic prose, and for Schreiner herself they seem to have been the most fulfilling method of self-expression. Interestingly, she speaks of 'The Prelude' section of From Man to Man and the whole of Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland as having 'flashed' upon her in more or less completed form; both are pieces of work which contain sustained passages of dream/fantasy (Trooper Peter Halket is, in fact, a kind of political parable in itself), and which are, I would argue, the best prose she has written, blending superbly the African landscape with a multi-faceted consciousness of what Lessing's Martha Quest names the "difficult knowledge" (84) of spiritual experience.

Writing to Ellis of her book on Mary Wollstonecraft - in progress at the time of work on Dreams but never completed - Schreiner says:

It is all poetry from the first to the last, except a few sentences. There are six or seven allegories in it; I've tried to keep them out, but I can't. I have come to the conclusion that only poetry is truth. That other forms are parts of truth, but as soon as a representation has all parts, then it is poetry. As soon as there is the form and the spirit, the passion and the thought, then there is poetry, or the living reality .. It's the other that's fancy and fiction, and this that is real. It's so easy for a mind like mine to produce long logical arguments, or strings of assertions, but when I have done it I feel such a 'valch' against it: that is only the material; it has to be combined and made alive ... (85)

Schreiner talks of allegory here as if it is an inevitable form of writing for her to adopt - 'I've tried to keep them out, but I can't'. Its very purity of form, its dynamic suggestiveness, seems suited to the truth, the essence of the 'living reality' she attempted to capture and express through her Dreams. "It is those allegories into which she declares she puts the soul of her soul", noted Arthur Symons, (86) and continued:

All art is symbol, and these are pure symbol themselves - the only artistic expression of the passion of abstract ideas, which to her are the keenest, the deepest in her nature; and in these allegories one can express humanity, not merely this man or that, so that a whole story can be concentrated into a tiny allegory. (87)

In 'A Dream of Wild Bees' Schreiner uses one of her favourite anonymous figures to 'express humanity', a mother. Again this is a dream rooted in palpable reality; the direct opening paragraph establishes an immediate sense of scene and atmosphere, while at the same time preparing the way for entry into the dreaming state:

A mother sat alone at an open window. Through it came the voices of the children as they played under the acacia-trees, and the breath of the hot afternoon air. In and out of the room flew the bees, the wild bees, with their legs yellow with pollen, going to and from the acacia-trees, droning all the while. She sat on a low chair before the table and darned. She took her work from the great basket that stood before her on the table: some lay on her knee and half-covered the book that rested there. She watched the needle go in and out; and the dreary hum of the bees and the noise of the children's voices became a confused murmur in her ears, as she worked slowly and more slowly. Then the bees, the long-legged wasp-like fellows who make no honey, flew closer and closer to her head, droning. Then she grew more and more drowsy, and she laid her hand, with the stocking over it, on the edge of the table, and leaned her head upon it. And the voices of the children outside grew more and more dreamy, came now far, now near; then she did not hear them, but she felt under her heart where the ninth child lay. Bent forward and sleeping there, with the bees flying about her head, she had a weird brain-picture ... (88)

This opening calm, hot, peaceful scene is reminiscent of the picture of the farmyard at the end of African Farm which provokes one of Waldo's "old dreaming fits". Here the children's voices drifting in through the open window, the balmy air, the droning bees lull woman - and reader - into a peaceful state of receptiveness. Like the Dutch painters of mellow domestic interiors, Schreiner is adept at finding beauty in the most homely things. This portrait of a working mother, pregnant with her ninth child, is certainly idealised. No mention of care-worn features, calloused hands, aching back. Presumably it is all other eight children who are amusing themselves cooperatively outside .. But from her portrait of Rebekah in From Man to Man,



we know that Schreiner was all too aware of the paradoxes and problems of maternity, as well as being able to celebrate its joys. Here in her dreams and allegories she is writing at one remove from reality; the tone is that of fable or fairy-tale.

The substance of the sleeping mother's 'weird brain picture' is, in fact, familiar fairy-tale format. As the bees are transformed into "human creatures" who approach the sleeping embryo within her and offer life-long favours or gifts, we are reminded of the Sleeping Beauty's visiting fairies. In turn, Health, Wealth, Fame, Love and Talent offer to 'touch' the child. Then, ominously, from "the shadow of the room" comes "one with sallow face, deep-lined, the cheeks drawn into hollows, and a mouth smiling quiveringly" (89). The mother recoils fearfully as this figure offers only a future life of "burning fever", illusory wealth, lonely wandering, loveless failure. The images are familiar: the winding path "traced out in the sand by a finger which no man sees", which "leads almost to the top, and then turns down suddenly into the valley"; the light playing "far off along the horizon" which must be travelled towards alone. "The thing he loves will not journey with him." And finally the mirage:

.. far off across the burning sands where, to other men, there is only the desert's waste, he shall see a blue sea! On that sea the sun shines always, and the water is blue as burning amethyst, and the foam is white on the shore. A great land rises from it, and he shall see upon the mountain-tops burning gold. (90)

To the mother's anxious questions of 'He shall reach it? Is it real' the figure replies enigmatically with another question: "What is real?" Seemingly satisfied, the mother looks up between his guarded, knowing "half-closed eyelids" and invites him to touch the child, which he does, smilingly announcing his reward - "that the ideal shall be real to thee". Within the sleeping mother the newly-forming creature is seen also to dream.

In those eyes that had never seen the day, in that half-shaped brain was a sensation of light! Light - that it never had seen. Light - that perhaps it never should see. Light - that existed somewhere! (91)

Like the hunter dying with the single white feather, an intimation of eternal truth and unity, so the baby 'trembles' within the womb with the pre-birth consciousness of spiritual illumination.

The sense of a striving towards such light which is ultimately discovered within the individual self is the message of the longest of Schreiner's Dreams, 'The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed', a Blakean fantasy of a journey to Heaven and Hell which unites Schreiner's spiritual and political ideals. "There is more of herself in it than in anything she has ever done", remarked Arthur Symonds, (92) who listened to Schreiner recite parts dramatically to him "in her wonderful low voice". "This allegory has all her Socialistic strivings, and thus, at present, all her soul ... It is music, and a picture .." (93)

The rhythmic and visual elements of the story are powerfully manipulated by Schreiner as she guides the reader from Hell to Heaven. "Hell was a fair place; the water of the lake was blue." Beneath the simplicity, the innocence, the beautiful women gliding beneath yellow fruit trees, tall and graceful in trailing robes of "many delicate colours", lies a lurking horror. Stealthily each woman bites and injects the fruit with poison so "that another may not eat". All around is fearful competition: we see men digging camouflaged holes "into which their fellows may sink", and in the great marble hall people sing, dance and drink the red wine which is the blood "pressed" from their own companions whose cries of torture are blocked off by the desperate revelry and a thick dividing curtain.

Between the narrator and God Schreiner builds up a pattern of question and answer which increases the atmosphere of foreboding:

I said, 'How came they by their jars of wine?'

God said, 'In the treading of the press there are they who came to the top; they have climbed out over the edge, and filled their jars from below, and have gone into the house.' And I said, 'And if they had fallen as they climbed - ?' God said, 'They had been wine'.

I stood a way off watching in the sunshine, and I shivered. (94)

The rhythm of this question and answering leads into the crescendo of the hypocritical church service, a parody of the communion ritual, as the revellers repeat feverishly the preacher's words building up to the climactic chant of "More wine! Wine! Wine!! Wine!!! Dear Lord!" (95), a frenzy of pseudo-evangelical ecstasy. This social system based on exploitation, slavery and fear is startlingly symbolized by the small, white and bloodless "wine-pressed hand", slipping beneath the curtain and gesticulating towards the wine-jars; and also by the silent row of mounds outside the banquet-house, graves of those who "rose up at the feast and cried" (96); who dared to defy the system and expose the real source of the 'wine'. Schreiner intended Dreams to be read by the very upholders of this system, "capitalists, millionaires and middlemen in England and America". (97) The scenes of desperate debauchery are intended to shock, detailed and direct.

Men, when they had drunk till they could no longer, threw what was left in their glasses up to the roof, and let it fall back in cascades. Women dyed their children's garments in the wine, and fed them on it till their tiny mouths were red. Sometimes, as the dancers whirled, they overturned a vessel, and their garments were bespattered. Children sat upon the floor with great bowls of wine, and swam rose-leaves on it, for boats. They put their hands in the wine and blew large red bubbles. (98)

Leaving the bedlam of the banquet house, the frantic melodrama of consumption, greed and tainted innocence, the narrator is brought to scenes of desolation and decay, former sites of other feasting-halls. In the desert sands she sees two standing figures - angels of death?\* - "with wings

\* Cronwright-Schreiner has described in his biography of Olive a time when she was living near Crystal Palace and "was ... very depressed, and came to hate the Palace ... One cast, of a figure with wings, had an awful fascination and horror for her". Perhaps this is the source of these two grim watchers in the desert.

(see The Life of Olive Schreiner, p.153)

upfolded high above their heads, and stern faces set, neither man nor beast ... watching, watching, watching! I did not ask God what they were for I knew what the answer would be". (99) Schreiner evokes an atmosphere of darkness, weariness, hopelessness through carefully chosen images. On a solitary pillar sits "a grey owl-of-the-desert, with folded wings; and in the evening light I saw the desert fox creep past it, trailing his brush across the sand". (100) These are known features of her Karroo, transformed into part of a spiritual wasteland. The scenes in Hell are a dark reflection of reality; the narrator wonders why God laughs when she expresses a wish to return "to the earth from which I came; it was better there", (101) for she does not realise what she sees is an inescapable part of her own psyche.

The depression of the dream is still with the dreamer when she wakes. Schreiner uses a familiar metaphor of suffocation to describe the feeling of oppressive horror. "In the dark it seemed as if a great hand lay upon my heart, and crushed it. I tried to breathe and tossed from side to side." (102) With sleep she enters Heaven, a radiant, fertile place of harmony and co-operation, where the naked bodies of the people give out a light which makes plants grow. Relationships between the sexes are equal and flexible; although heterosexuality is seen as ideal - "when one man and one woman shine together, it makes the most perfect light" (103) - other variations are also necessary for "there are more kinds of plants in Heaven than one, and they need many kinds of light". (104)

Again the travelling with God is seen as a process of self-education and gradual 'enlightenment', often involving self-doubt and painful struggle. In contrast to the pictures and sounds of Hell the emphasis here is on illumination and concord; instead of competition there is a sharing of resources. The stones that each man finds, labouring on the mountainside

quarry, he passes on to another, and all go to make a crown which is "wrought according to a marvellous pattern; one pattern ran through all, yet each part was different". (105)

At the top of the bare mountain, in the thin, pure air and the "unbroken stillness" they came upon a lonely androgynous figure.

Whether it were man or woman I could not tell; for partly it seemed the figure of a woman, but its limbs were the mighty limbs of a man. I asked God whether it was man or woman.

God said, "In the least Heaven sex reigns supreme; in the higher it is not noticed; but in the highest it does not exist." (106)

Once more Schreiner equates the ultimate spiritual awakening, or state of 'Nirvana', with a genderless purity, and also, with a sense of both solitariness and union with all things. The narrator pities the lone figure as she thinks of the social interaction of the garden "where men sang with their arms around one another", and of the mountainside "where they worked in company". (107) But God points out that the figure is in touch with all around it:

From that lone height on which he stands, all things are open. To him is clear the striving in the garden, he sees the flower break forth and the streams sparkle; no shout is raised upon the mountain-side but his ear may hear it. He sees the crown grow and the light shoot from it. All Hell is open to him. He sees the paths mount upwards. To him, Hell is the seed ground from which Heaven springs. He sees the sap ascending. (108)

As the figure makes music with its work its light falls on and transfigures the narrator; a sudden integration takes place:

... it grew so bright I could not see things separately; and which were God, or the man, or I, I could not tell; we were all blended. I cried to God, 'Where are you?' but there was no answer, only music and light. (109)

This fleeting moment of ecstasy is recaptured through the 'real' music and light of the ordinary world. When God tells the incredulous dreamer, who longs now to remain in Heaven, to return to earth for "that which you seek is there", she loses hope. Waking to the "dull grey world" of the London

street seen through the "narrow attic window" she becomes aware of the stream of humanity passing below, amidst which "at the alley's mouth, at the street corner, a broken barrel-organ was playing; sometimes it quavered and almost stopped, then went on again, like a broken human voice". (110) In this discordant music the narrator recognises a common pulse which unites her with the crowds below, a striving towards "The Beautiful", "Love" and "Truth" which she has experienced through the ideal, transforming music in Heaven. And as she wakes fully she also sees the light: "Upon the faded quilt, across my bed a long yellow streak of pale London sunlight was lying." (111) It is a moving, understated moment of 'awakening'.

Images of light and darkness pervade almost all Schreiner's dreams and allegories, whether symbolic of dreaming and waking, the 'dark night of the soul' and the sudden radiance of mystical illumination - as in 'A Soul's Journey-Two Visions' (Dreams and Allegories), 'The Hunter' (Dreams) - or as evocative literal description of the African landscape which is the backdrop for her Utopian fantasies - as in the sunset and sunrise over the wide spaces of the veld in 'Three Dreams in a Desert' with its vision of sexual equality, and in the gold and crimson evening sky in 'Seeds A-Growing' (Dreams and Allegories), written while Olive lived under martial law in Hanover, which envisages a new future of liberation for South Africa after the bloodshed of war. The timelessness of the Karroo landscape enables Schreiner to link past, present, and future, to bring together her childlike receptiveness to the environment, her artist's immediate realization in words of that experiencing of nature, and the visionary's creation of "a far-off world" (112) in which allegorical events take place.

The sense of natural continuity and a rhythm of life which absorbs into a greater whole the lives and deaths of individuals is strongly evident in the short story 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine' (Stories, Dreams and Allegories)

It is the tale of two indomitable Boer women, a mother and daughter-in-law, and their struggle for survival in a war-torn land, facing the deaths of husbands, sons and grandsons through hunting and battle. As always when writing of the Boer people Schreiner can, and does, lapse into cloying sentimentality coloured by racist fervour, disturbing to the modern reader. The strength of her writing here lies in the straight-forward description of the relationship between these rugged women and the land they farm.

One of the final scenes is a quiet celebration of "this deep, mystical and impersonal affection for South Africa" which Schreiner saw in the hearts of the pioneering people. "Not for the land, as inhabited by human beings, and formed into social and political organizations" but for "the actual physical country, with its plains, rocks and skies". (113) -- It is a boldly visual passage, with the stark lines of a Kathe Kollwitz picture, the women seen as figures in a landscape of light and shadow:

The mould in the lands was black and soft; it lay in long ridges, as it had been ploughed up a week before, but the last night's rain has softened it and made it moist and ready for putting in the seed.

The bags which the women carried on their arms were full of the seed of pumpkins and mealies. They began to walk up the lands, keeping parallel with the low hedge of dried bushes that ran up along the side of the sloop almost up to the top of the ridge. At every few paces they stopped and bent down to press into the earth, now one and then the other kind of seed from their bags. Slowly they walked up and down till they reached the top of the land almost on the horizon line; and then they turned, and walked down, sowing as they went. When they had reached the bottom of the land before the farm-house it was almost sunset, and their bags were nearly empty; but they turned to go up once more. The light of the setting sun cast long, gaunt shadows from the figures across the ploughed land, over the low hedge and the sloop, into the bare veld beyond; shadows that grew longer and longer as they passed slowly on pressing in the seeds.. The seeds ... that were to lie in the dank, dark earth, and rot there, seemingly, to die, till their outer covering had split and fallen from them .. and then, when the rains had fallen, and the sun had shone, to come up above the earth again, and high in the clean air to lift their feathery plumes and hang out their pointed leaves and silken tassels! To cover the ground with a mantle of green and gold through which sunlight quivered, over which

the insects hung by thousands, carrying yellow pollen on their legs and wings and making the air alive with their hum and stir, while grain and fruit ripened surely .. for the next season's harvest!

When the sun had set, the two women with their empty bags turned and walked silently home in the dark to the farmhouse. (114)

The contrasts here are vivid; the light and dark of the changing evening landscape linked to images of sterility and fecundity - the "long, gaunt shadows" of the women, their childbearing over, stretching out over the "bare veld", their sons and husbands dead, yet working to enrich the land with seeds which will lie, seemingly to "rot" in the "dank, dark earth" only to transform the barren ground later with "a mantle of green and gold through which sunlight quivered". The organic connection between people and land is reinforced through the image of the mealies! - "silken tassels" which echoes the departure of the last male, the grandson, for the battle front: "he took off his hat and waved it in the air; the early morning sunshine made his hair as yellow as the tassels that hang from the head of ripening mealies". (115)

Howard Thurman has remarked on these links, this "sense of vastness and timelessness" in Schreiner's writing:

There seems to be a built-in tendency for people to correspond with their environment. Moments there are when the boundaries or the self within which one 'deals' with the environment seem to fade and reappear, fade and reappear ... One is invaded by the environment rather than merely internalizing it. (116)

This merging of individual and landscape, self and setting, which prompts the fading/reappearing rhythm of African Farm, and the movement of many of Schreiner's stories, dreams and allegories, also encouraged in Schreiner a sense of self-definition and profound tranquility. In the Karroo she could both 'lose' and 'find' herself. She writes clearly of this experience in her Thoughts on South Africa:



Those motionless hills; the very knotted Karroo stem at your hand, for how many generations have the leaves sprouted and fallen from its gnarled stalk? The Bushman and the wild buck have crept over the scene; they have gone, and the Englishman with his horse and gun have gone; but the plain lies with its sharp stones turned to the sky unchanged through the centuries. Those two stones standing loosely one upon another have stood so for thousands of years, because there was no hand to sever them.

It is not fear one feels, with that clear, blue sky above one; that which creeps over one is not dread. It was amid such scenes as these, amid such motionless, immeasurable silences, that the Oriental mind first framed its noblest conception of the unknown, the 'I am that I am' of the Hebrew. --(117)

Other women writers, past and present, living in the "motionless immeasurable silences" of Africa have recognized and expressed similar states of consciousness. In A Revolutionary Woman, Sheila Fugard's powerful study of love and violence, racial tension and the limits of personal and political freedom, her heroine Christina is profoundly affected by the stark, mysterious landscape in which she lives and works:

The thicket of trees is suddenly tinged with a golden light. The veld holds myriads of secrets. There are meanings now under stones, and the thunder has a voice, and the sky is a face ... I believe that there is a code that can unlock the universe. (118)

Aware of this unifying "code" was also Karen Blixen, whose colonial experience of East Africa and her intense identification with the land and its people are vividly evoked in her autobiographical Out of Africa. Here we find echoed the sense of awe, delight and wholeness which Schreiner felt in the air and space of her Karroo:

How beautiful were the evenings ... when after sunset we arrived at the river or the water-hole where we were to outspan .. The plains with the thorn-trees on them were already quite dark, but the air was filled with clarity - and over our heads .. a single star which was to grow big and radiant in the course of the night was now just visible, like a silver point in the sky of citrine topaz. The air was cold to the lungs, the long grass dripping wet, and the herbs on it gave out their spiced astringent scent. In a little while on all sides the cicadas would begin to sing. The grass was me, and the air, the distant invisible mountains were me, the tired oxen were me. I breathed with the slight night-wind in the thorn-trees. (119)

With this integration with the environment came also a vitality, a re-birth, a new acknowledgement of self: "Up in this high air you breathed easily, drawing in a vital assurance and lightness of heart. In the highlands you woke up in the morning and thought: Here I am, where I ought to be." (120)

It was the air and space of the veld which the asthma-ridden Schreiner craved when in Britain, a longing which was both physical and psychic, a need for the relief of easy breathing, bodily well-being, a "vital assurance" and a release from the social pressures of urban living bringing with it an acceptance of self, a "lightness of heart". Her descriptions of life in London often reflect an almost paranoid sense of claustrophobia. "It is my land, my own that I have been longing for in London fogs and summer mist and drizzels [sic]", she wrote to Carpenter, "shut in with hedges and those terrible high walls in England that nearly break one's heart". (121) Comparing her feeling for Africa with Ellis' enthusiastic descriptions of his time in Australia, she writes:

Yes, our African sky gives one the same sense of perfect freedom and wild exhilaration; sometimes one feels as though, for no reason that could be given, one were almost in an ecstasy of happiness when one goes out alone. Here one is never alone. (122)

Schreiner frequently, in fact, speaks of solitariness in her London correspondence but it is a "terrible loneliness", "the sense of being entirely cut off from one's fellows". (123) This isolated sense of alienation was to increase in the war years when her lack of patriotic fervour and her outspoken pacifism effectively 'cut her off' from even her friends.

This afternoon I felt I couldn't stay alone in this room any more, I'd go mad, I've only once before felt such an agony of oppression, so in the pouring rain, I went on the top of a bus to Barnes and back. (124)

Although she encountered similar bigotry and social ostracism in South Africa, the vast plains of the Karroo provided a therapeutic release. Here loneliness became an emphatically positive, dynamic state of being:

Do you know the effect of this scenery is to make me so silent and self-contained. And it is so bare - the rocks and the bushes, each bush standing separate from the others alone by itself. I went [on] a long walk this morning away out into the Karroo and found some large bent old trees in the dry river course. I will make that my walking up and down place ... (125)

It is not surprising, then, that when Schreiner came to write her most incisive piece of work on South African political policy, Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland, the setting she chose was not the board rooms of Cape Town or Johannesburg, but the Karroo; that this political fable should be the story of a conversion in the desert seems an inevitable form for Schreiner to adopt, with its blending of the personal, political and spiritual through a dramatic manipulation of reality and fantasy. The work seems to have been inspired, as often happened with Schreiner, by a direct experiencing of the beauty of the natural world around her. She was on holiday with Cronwright at the time.

The first four days we were here we did nothing but bathe and walk about barefoot on the sand, but the other morning I woke, and as I opened my eyes there was an allegory full-fledged in my mind, a sort of allegory story about Matabele land ... (126)

Olive was all too aware of the consequences of formulating such an open attack on Rhodes' infamous Chartered Company at a time when his imperial troops were in the process of conquering and slaughtering - 'pacifying' - the rebellious Matabele and Mashona tribes. She wrote of her dilemma to her brother Will:

After I had finished Peter Halket I spent three days and nights almost entirely without sleep pacing up and down my verandah trying to decide whether I should publish it or not. I believed that Rhodes and the Chartered Company would proceed against me; and I felt sure that the matter would kill me, as it did to a very large extent. (127)

But the matter 'decided itself', the decision being made, as she describes it, at a spiritual, intuitive, rather than matter-of-factly political level:

Don't think I mean anything super-natural takes place; though that decision which one's nature gives when one tries to silence the lower and purely personal interest and to allow the higher element in it to adjudicate among themselves is what the ancients called the 'Voice of God', and is so to a certain extent; because it [is] the highest and for each soul within itself, the most ultimate injunction it can ever receive .. (128)

Schreiner's story - or perhaps novella is a more appropriate term for something of this scope and length - describes an encounter at night on the veld between Christ and Peter Halket, an English soldier temporarily lost from his company which is engaged in putting down the Mashonaland rebellion. A dialogue between the two men reveals the atrocities committed by the Chartered Company troops and the confused and prejudiced thinking of Halket himself, which is consistently and pointedly brought out and counteracted by the gentle 'stranger's' questioning and story-telling. Eventually, realising the error of his ways, Peter - whose other name is Simon - puts himself forward as a follower of Christ. In the second section of the book, set back in the army camp, Halket sets free a captured native and is shot himself in the process.

The story is a complex portrait of the colonial mind, a shocking exposé of racist attitudes and one which unfortunately remains all too relevant to present events in South Africa. The disturbing and grotesque frontispiece photograph of the first edition (subsequently removed and only recently re-instated) of three blacks hanging from a tree observed with frightening detachment by a group of white frontiersmen cannot be dismissed as a historical relic of a more brutal past. Stephen Gray, in his essay on the book, has noted that

Trooper Peter Halket is a work built out of issues, and because these issues are .. still on hand, it seems that it demands to be tackled in terms of them. Schreiner meant the work as a moral challenge to the English world and ... the challenge should be frontally accepted. (129)

While acknowledging the emphasis Gray gives, I cannot meet the demands of this challenge here; the story deserves a fuller analysis than I can give for the purpose of this study, in which I want to concentrate simply on Schreiner's movement between realism and allegory and the importance of setting to the whole.

Despite the length of the conversation sequence between Peter and Christ, with its argument, repetition and stylised question and answer pattern (reminiscent of the technique employed in 'The Sunlight lay ...'), Schreiner draws us back again and again to the flickering fire on the kopje with which the story started with customary directness:

It was a dark night; a chill breath was coming from the east; not enough to disturb the blaze of Trooper Peter Halket's fire, yet enough to make it quiver. He sat alone beside it on the top of the kopje.

All about was an impenetrable darkness; not a star was visible in the black curve over his head. (130)

The reader experiences the Karroo night through Halket's fear of the vast unknown. Schreiner wrote disparagingly of the woman just out of England who broke down at her first sight of the limitless plains. "Oh, it's so terrible! There's so much of it! So much!" (131) Halket's is a similar, alienated response to the land, with which his only relationship has been one of destruction and ignorance:

He had not much fear of the natives, their kraals had been destroyed and their granaries burnt for thirty miles round, and they themselves had fled: but he feared, somewhat, the lions, which he had never seen, but of which he had heard, and which might be cowering in the long grasses and brush wood at the kopje's foot:- and he feared, vaguely, he hardly knew what, when he looked forward to his first long night alone in the veld. (132)

He finds his utter loneliness alarming, missing the swaggering companionship of his fellow soldiers, "talking of the niggers they had shot or the kraals they had destroyed, or grumbling over their rations". (133) His straining, fearful sensitivity to his surroundings is evoked in his exaggerated

awareness of the chill night air, the "occasional cracking of the wood", the slight whistle of the breeze as it crept past the stones on the kopje. He feels "oppressed" by the darkness and silence, wishing that "the wind would blow a little louder, instead of making that little wheezing sound". (134) Time also becomes distorted: "It was only half past ten, and it seemed to him he had been sitting here ten hours at the least." (135)

~~His unaccustomed solitariness and the hypnotic flames of the fire induce an unusual state of reflection.~~

~~As a rule he lived in the world immediately about him, and let the things of the moment impinge on him, and fall off again as they would. But tonight on the kopje he fell to thinking and his thoughts shaped themselves into connected chains. (136)~~

~~He goes back into the English village world of his childhood; memories of ducklings, ponds, birdsnesting, schooldays and notably his closeness as a boy to his mother. Mingled with these pictures of the past are "prints on the school house wall on which the afternoon sun used to shine when he was kept in". These portrayed "Jesus of Judea blessing the children, and one picture just over the door where he hung with his arms stretched out and the blood dripping from his feet". (137) This nostalgic passage serves to link up with the appearance of the Sunday school-picture-Christ at his fireside on the veld and Peter's personal sense of the caring stranger and his mother as one:~~

~~I've been wondering ever since you came, who it was you reminded me of. It's my mother! .. when your eyes look at me it seems to me as if it was she looking at me. (138)~~

~~As Peter kneels before the stranger before he leaves "it was as, when a little child, his mother folded him to her". (139) It also blends in with Christ's appeals for an end to slavery and domination and his exhortation to the "women of England" to take responsibility not merely for their own flesh and blood but also to listen to "the voice of the child-peoples" from "over seas and across continents". (140)~~

Although Schreiner's vision, through the stranger's words, of international brother/sisterhood and freedom seems now undeniably dated, with its occasional sentimental and patronising images of "child-peoples", the portrait she builds up of Peter, with his exploitative and naive dreams of wealth and success, his casual references to rape and murder, his puzzled, stumbling responses to Christ's provocative questions, has lost none of its immediacy; it is a compellingly credible analysis of the brutalising effects of colonialism on the individual psyche.

As he stares into the fire his train of thought becomes hazier, muddled, "a chain of disconnected pictures, painting themselves in irrelevant order on his brain:...

Now, as he looked into the crackling blaze, it seemed to be one of the fires they had made to burn the natives' grain by, and they were throwing in all they could not carry away: then, he seemed to see his mother's fat ducks waddling down the little path with the green grass on each side. Then, he seemed to see his huts where he lived with the prospectors, and the native women who used to live with him; and he wondered where the women were. Then - he saw the skull of an old Mashona blown off at the top, the hands still moving. He heard the loud cry of the native women and children as they turned the maxims on to the kraal; and then he heard the dynamite explode that blew up a cave. Then again he was working a maxim gun, but it seemed to him it was more like the reaping machine he used to work in England, and that what was going down before it was not yellow corn, but black men's heads; and he thought when he looked back they lay behind him in rows, like the corn in sheaves.

The logs sent up a flame clear and high, and, where they split, showed a burning core inside: the cracking and spluttering sounded in his brain like the discharge of a battery of artillery. Then he thought of a black woman he and another man caught alone in the bush, her baby on her back, but young and pretty. Well, they didn't shoot her! - and a black woman wasn't white! His mother didn't understand these things; it was all so different in England from South Africa. You couldn't be expected to do the same sort of things here as there. He had an unpleasant feeling that he was justifying himself to his mother, and that he didn't know how to.

He leaned further and further forward .. There was no picture left on his brain now, but simply an impress of the blazing logs before him. (141)

I have quoted this passage at length because it demonstrates how skillfully Schreiner charts Peter's stream-of-consciousness to increase the sense of alienation not only from the land and people he is destroying but also from himself. The passage is riddled with the guilt, fear and ignorance which the stranger will expose and bring Peter to recognise through his questions. Yet here the feelings are still unacknowledged - for Peter the images criss-crossing his mind seem merely "disconnected pictures" in "irrelevant order". However, Schreiner's juxtaposition of images - the soldier's destruction of native grain supplies and Peter's mother's fat ducks, the maxim gun and reaping machine, the horrific creation/destruction scene of "yellow corn" becoming "black mens' heads" - develop for the reader a connecting picture which blends the surreal, jumbled up flashes of nightmarish vision with the cold horror of reality. Again Schreiner pulls us back to the present actuality of the fire on the kopje, which just as rapidly leads once more into Halket's confused mind - "the cracking and spluttering sounded in his brain like the discharge of a battery of artillery" - where black women, sex and violence are inextricably mixed. The full obscenity of rape is starkly outlined in Halket's blustering expostulations - "but young and pretty. Well, they didn't shoot her! - and a black woman wasn't white!" Subconsciously there is an immediate connection for him between the young black mother and his own mother to whom he feels he is 'justifying' himself just as he will do to the stranger.

It rapidly becomes clear to the reader that the barefooted stranger who visits and talks to Peter on the lonely kopje is actually Jesus Christ, yet Peter never manages to name him as such; he remains 'stranger' or 'friend'. As Stephen Gray points out this is a deliberate device on Schreiner's part, emphasising further "the locking factor in the Colonial brain". (142)



While Peter's behaviour towards this figure indicates pretty decisively that he must know what the scene is doing to him, his dogged refusal to articulate the magical, ideal, recognizing name is symptomatic of his refusal to become totally consciously aware of what he is undergoing. (143)

The whole conversation/conversion section with Christ is itself 'magical', idealized, and yet Halket's transformation, like that of Gregory Rose, is curiously credible. How?

Christ's arrival on the kopje is built up to on several levels and skilfully integrated into the rest of the story; as we have seen, Schreiner vividly evokes the atmosphere of a Karrōo night -- the sights, sounds and smells around that lonely crackling fire -- into which Christ walks, animal-like, with "slow even tread". The parables he tells are in turn directly linked to the ironstone wastes around them: -- Advocating inter-racial harmony: Christ tells Peter that with the black man: --

You are the twin branches of one tree; you are the sons of one mother. Is this goodly land not wide enough for you, that you should rend each other's flesh at the bidding of those who will wet their beaks within both your vitals? -  
- Look up, see, they circle in the air above you!

Almost Peter Halket started and looked upward; but there was only the black sky of Mashonaland over his head. (144)

Echoing this in the second section of the story, vultures are mentioned twice, seen flying southwards over destroyed kraals and "two hundred black carcasses" lying in the sun. (145) The "flat-topped tree" with its "white stem" to which the captured black man is tied and beneath which Peter is shot by his own Captain, has "two stunted misshapen branches, like arms, stretched out on either side". (146) Crucifix and tree/black and white/nature and man - interconnecting symbols like these are woven throughout the text.

The vision in which Christ and Peter talk and revelation slowly dawns is also led up to by Peter's lapsing into that dream-like state, common in Schreiner's allegorical writing, induced here by the surrounding darkness

and focal, flickering fire. By daylight, in the burning mid-day sun of the second section which evokes the desultory, temporary atmosphere of the army camp smelling of cooking mealies and tobacco smoke, Halket's trance-like experience is accounted for in matter-of-fact terms by a bluff soldier:

He's never been quite right since that time he got lost and spent the night out on the kopje. When we found him in the morning he was in a kind of dead sleep; we couldn't wake him; yet it wasn't cold enough for him to have been frozen. He's never been the same man since; queer, you know; giving his rations away to the coloured boys, and letting the other fellows have his dot of brandy at night; and keeping himself sort of apart to himself, you know. The other fellows think he's got a touch of fever on, caught wandering about in the long grass. But . . . I think it's being alone in the veld that's got hold of him. Man, have you ever been out like that, alone in the veld, night and day, and not a soul to speak to? I have; and I tell you, if I'd been left there three days longer I'd have gone mad or turned religious. Man, it's the nights, with the stars up above you, and the dead still all around. And you think, and think, and think!

.. I used to talk to myself at last, and make believe it was another man ... But I think it's the loneliness that got hold of him. Man, those stars are awful; and that stillness that comes toward morning!.. (147)

So, humourously, ironically, Peter's transformation is made realistically possible, 'explained' by a fellow soldier. By this time Peter himself has become a mere background figure, 'keeping himself sort of apart to himself', misunderstood, 'queer'. The first section ended with the foreboding line: "And Trooper Peter Halket sat alone upon the kopje"; it echoes the first lines of the story when we see him as a frightened soldier, physically 'alone' in the veld. In the later stages of the allegory he becomes spiritually and politically a lone figure.

In his attempt to act on his new knowledge and live out the words of Christ he is shot by his Captain, effectively silenced by his own side. The captive runs to (temporary) freedom. Only through death are black and white seen to come together:

... one hour after Peter Halket had stood outside the tent looking up, he was lying under the little tree, with the red sand trodden down over him, in which a black man and a white man's blood were mingled. (148)

The final paragraph contains both a glimmer of hope and a profound pessimism as we see the "morning sun" lighting up "the little stunted tree with its white stem and outstretched arms", and the stones of Peter's grave beneath it. As the troops leave the camp two soldiers reflect on Halket's action, one admitting that "I hardly know .. whether it is not better for him now, than for us." (149) But such temporary doubting is not enough; "they rode on after the troop".

"Schreiner is not announcing the new dawn around the corner", writes Stephen Gray,

and she is not so simplistic as to have supposed that were Rhodes and his Chartered Company ruled out of Mashonaland the devil's wounds would have been cauterized and healed. She is merely announcing that the new dawn will remain postponed until those inhibiting factors which suppress the Colonial mind .. are analyzed, understood, and transcended by a process of recognition. (150)

Although Peter Halket is doomed to fail, Schreiner's allegorical charting of such a 'process of recognition' through one man's experience in the dark Karroo remains a forceful statement about the potential for peaceful co-existence between races, for political and spiritual harmony, and for personal integration. The daring structure of the work, which demonstrates as Gray points out, that "layer upon layer of meaning can co-exist with far less chaos than one would suppose", (151) is surely one of her most significant creative achievements.

Just as Schreiner describes how the "allegory story" of Trooper Peter Halket flashed 'fullfledged' into her mind so too, she tells her friend Mrs. Francis Smith, did the Prelude of From Man to Man, years after writing the rough draft of the novel itself:

One day .. I was on the Riviera at Alassio; I was sitting at my dear old desk writing an article on the Bushmen and giving a description of their skulls; when suddenly, in an instant, the whole of this little Prelude flashed on me. You know those folded-up views of places one buys; you take hold of one end and all the pictures unfold one after the other as quick as light. That was how it flashed on me. I started up and paced about the room. I felt absolutely astonished. I hadn't thought of my novel for months, I hadn't looked at it for years. I'd never dreamed of writing a prelude to it, - I just sat down and wrote it out. And do you know what I found out - after I'd written it? - that it's a picture in small, a kind of allegory, of the life of the woman in the book!! It's one of the strangest things I know of. My mind must have been working at it unconsciously, though I knew nothing of it - otherwise how did it come? (152)

Paul Foot, in his introduction to the Virago edition of the novel, calls this delightful 'picture in small', "one of the most thrilling pieces of writing in all our literature". (153) This is no exaggeration. Few writers have captured with such freshness and simplicity, such lack of sentimentality, the workings of a child's mind. Here Schreiner blends her story-telling ability, her inclination toward fantasy and allegory, with autobiographical experience and with direct, evocative description of the Boer farm setting she knew so well, as she follows the child Rebekah's experience of life and death during one hot day ...

Having already covered parts of the Prelude in previous chapters - the description of Rebekah's old soapbox with its "odd collection" of treasured objects, her encounter with the 'krinkling' yellow cobra in the long grass - I will concentrate here on the dreaming sequence and the 'stories' Rebekah tells her 'baby'. These are to be echoed later in the long passages of internal monologue which are an important part of the woman Rebekah's political and spiritual 'awakening', and also in the fables and tales she tells her own children.

Throughout the whole Prelude we are made constantly aware of the heat and stillness of the farm with its darkened rooms inside and lush vegetation

outside, between which Rebekah moves, a self-contained, introspective child, detached from the adult events within the house. The changes in intensity of heat, the sights, sounds, and smells of the day at all stages are sensuously brought to life, from the "rich dry odour" of the warm morning through to the "mellow haziness" of the late afternoon which casts a "soft, yellow, transparent veil" over everything. After she has seen her new baby sister for the first time, and decided she dislikes it with all the emphatic impetuosity and jealousy of childhood, Rebekah goes out deliberately into the farmyard during the hottest part of the morning; it seems to be a challenge both to herself and adult authority, a defiant 'so there', an assertion of self. In the simple prose characteristic of the Prelude Schreiner captures the atmosphere of oppressive heat and the child's masochistic delight in it.

Standing looking out into the yard where "the very stones seemed to throw up a red reflection" Rebekah 'shivers' with heat. Walking to the little "mouse house" she has built which stands "baking in the sun", "all the little crystals in the rock glittering", she feels the ground "burn under her feet" through the soles of her shoes. Sitting beside the play house, her skirts drawn "carefully under her, the rock burnt so", she knew "she ought not to be there in the hot sun; she knew it was wicked; but she liked the heat to burn her that morning". (154)

After a while the little drops of perspiration began to gather under her eyes and on her upper lip; she would not wipe them off. Her face began to get very red, and her temples to throb; the heat was fierce. She looked out at the mouse house from under her white kappie with blinking red eyes. She could feel the heat scorching her arms through her little cotton dress, and she liked it. (155)

Eventually she gives in, driven indoors by the pulsing of blood in her hot head - "there began to be a sound like a little cicada singing in her ears". (156)

When she next emerges at three in the afternoon - "she felt better now she was washed and had a clean starched dress on": (157) her self-identity reinforced by having been looked after, fed and cleaned - she goes through the flower-garden into the orchard with her picture-book. The trees and flowers wilt in the sun, the vine leaves hanging "dry and stiff", the orange leaves "curled and flaccid", the 'four-o-clocks' are "curled up tight though the trees sheltered them" and the fig trees "had culred up the edges of their leaves". (158) In the shade of a pear tree we see the child walking "round and round in the grass, like a dog" to make a comfortable nest in the long grass. It is a deliciously relaxed, simple, animal pleasure Schreiner evokes as we see Rebekah revelling in the peace and shade: "She drew up her legs, cocking one knee over the other" so that one foot waved in the air. She yawned luxuriously." (159)

Schreiner establishes an aura of tranquillity, a half-dreaming state as a prelude to Rebekah's fantasies. The child watches through "half-shut" eyes the "great, white masses of thunder cloud ... like ships sailing in the blue". In her alphabet book she becomes engrossed in her favourite picture of Peter and his Pig.

Whenever she looked at it she wanted to make up stories. She had made one long story about it: how people were not kind to Peter and he had no-one to love him but his pig, and how they both ran away together by that far-off road that went over the hill and saw all the beautiful things on the other side. (160)

Already the child translates personal experience into fiction; and already there is in her that "vague, insatiable hunger" that we see in the grown-up Rebekah as she gazes at those "far-off blue and purple mountains".

However on this particular day, when the foundations of her self-absorbed world have been shaken by the new baby, she finds "no meaning" in the picture. Her eyes 'dazzled' by the "great masses of cloud", she closes them and invents her own world of make-believe, as she sails off in a

cloud-ship to an island where, as "little Queen Victoria of South Africa" she meets the 'real' Queen Victoria. (161) On a river, its banks lined with "grass and thyme and forget-me-nots" she sees two swans swimming; "she had had a book with the picture of a swan swimming in a lake, and she had always thought she must die of joy if she should see a real swan .. and here were two!" (162)

She finds a scaled-down house with a little book-lined study, a desk and microscope -- ~~her sanctuary in later life~~ -- and a garden with miniature rakes and spades - the vineyard Rebekah makes her own in adulthood and through which finds an independence of sorts and fulfilment. Inside a "snow-white pod" hanging from a white bush she finds a baby, "lying inside it, like the seeds lie inside the pod of a mimosa tree". (163) To this baby, an organic part of the veld around her, Rebekah tells tales of talking animals, imagining a world of the future in which man and nature live in harmony and mutual understanding.

The 'baby' becomes a part of herself to which, in a detached and 'adult' tone, she can talk - a reassuring, self-affirming process. It is also the child's way of groping towards an acceptance, an understanding, through imaginative role-play, of the impact of the twin-baby's death. She 'reclaims' it as her own, having been denied it by the old Ayah. ("It is mine .. I found it. Mietje found hers in the hut, and Katje found hers behind the kraal. My mother found hers that cries so, in the bedroom. This one is mine". "O Lord, Lord!" cried old Ayah. 'I tell you this is your mother's baby; she had two, and this one is dead'.") (164)) The images here are drawn from those of Schreiner's own childhood memories. She urges 'her' baby not to fear the dark or the ticking of the clock (we remember the experiences of Undine and Waldo). She promises never to call it "a strange child" and acknowledges the right to independence, the falsity of

gender-restrictions: "You can climb trees and tear your clothes." (165)  
The child also affirms the value of writing, the need to create: "If you like to make up stories, I shall never let anyone laugh at you, when you walk up and down and talk to yourself. I know you must." (166)

In contrast to her own free-ranging stories she reveals the restrictions of conventional Victorian education, the limitations of "Miss Plumtree's Bible stories", and "Jane Taylor's Hymns for Infant Minds". In the tale of Hester Durham, "~~What Hester Durham lived For~~" - "a grown-up people's story" - we see similarly narrow and stereotyped views, of colonialism ("black people ... calling and yelling, with swords and sticks") and of woman's role as carer and martyr. ("~~to comfort those frail women and children in their last hour of despair, that was what Hester Durham lived for~~" (167)) Like Hester Durham, "alone, like a rock in a raging sea", Rebekah is to find a stoical courage and independence in adulthood, achieved at the expense of a true knowledge of herself and her sexuality.

Her feelings here about the male sex are expressed with childish directness: "I don't like real boys." (168) She has an imaginary playmate, Charles - emphatically not "a real boy", with whom she swaps stories; "we walk up and down together". This is the future 'New Man' of Rebekah's dreams, a sensitive, equal partner. The picture of her cousin Frank, later to become her husband, is already one of a superior, mocking, cruel male who taunts Rebekah and teases the cat.

Having sung the baby to sleep Rebekah builds, carefully and expertly, a playroom for it in the growing dusk of her dream:

The sun was setting on the island, and over the trees a strange soft evening light shone. There was a pink glow in the sky, and it reflected itself on everything. She stood perfectly still, holding the trowel in her hand, and looked at it. The swans were swimming up and down in the quiet water, far away, with their necks bent. They left a long snow white mark in the water, like the swans in the picture.



'The swan swam in a silvery lake.  
Well swam the swan!'

A spasm of delight thrilled up the spine of the child under the pear-tree. When a full-grown woman, long years afterwards she could always recall that island, the little house, the bricks, and wonderful light over earth and sky and the swans swimming on the still water. (169)

This is an inspiring, elegiac part of the Prelude, as Schreiner delicately blends dream and reality, child and woman, in a strangely timeless moment of reflective appreciation. We are then brought back to the immediacy of the child's day as we see her waking in the sun-scorched orchard: "All about lay the parched yellow grass, and the little dried peach trees, with their shrivelled leaves and drooping yellow peaches. Everything was brown and dry." (170) A herd of pigs - we recall Peter and his picture pig - attracts Rebekah's attention: "With a shout and whoop she rushed off after them, waving her kappie at them by one string." (171)

In spite of this sudden moment of action, all childish energy, noise and motion, the dreamlike atmosphere prevails in the "certain mellow haziness" of the veiled afternoon. "Dreamily gazing" again, the child Rebekah sees a sad, strange funeral procession, as her father goes with some servants in the distance to bury the dead baby. Yet Rebekah cannot identify the scene as such. "She could not see well; they were so far away and the soft yellow haze made things dreamy." (172) Schreiner captures perfectly here the child's detached unconsciousness, her inability to register and recognize something which, although seen, is as yet beyond her full understanding: "She stood still, looking out at them very drowsily thinking of nothing in particular, and hardly noting them." (173) Later, hypnotically repeating her multiplication table to herself in "the soft fading evening light", in a state of "blank" receptiveness, the sudden understanding of that scene, a knowledge of death, 'flashes' on her:

In an instant she knew well, and with an absolute certainty, that if she went down to the great dam behind the willow trees beyond the new lands, she would find there a little mound of earth, and that the baby from the spare room would be under it. (174)

Schreiner tells us now that Rebekah "had not let herself think of that baby since old Ayah had driven her out of the room". Her dreaming and story-telling were both an exploratory means of absorbing and recreating experience and a method of self-protection, escape - just as the adult Rebekah is to retreat to her study and inner private world of fantasy and writing to block off the knowledge of Frank's promiscuity. The child Rebekah's new knowledge carries a sense of loss of innocence, and a growth into greater understanding:

She knew ~~something of what birth and death mean,~~ which she had not known before. She would never again look for a new little baby, or expect to find it anywhere; vaguely but quite certainly something of its genesis had flashed on her. (175)

Gradually we see the child moving towards a larger consciousness of life and death, effectively symbolised in the scene of her watching the two flickering candles and experimenting, with eyes and hands, with the play of light and shadow. Again Schreiner draws out from a tenderly depicted part of the child's day, vividly evoked, greater meanings, a sense of that "mystery and insolubility of things".

She held up her hand and let the light shine through her fingers; the hand made a long dark shadow on the wall to the left of the room. Why was the shadow so much longer than the hand, she wondered, and why did it fall just where it did? She moved her hand and watched the shadow move. If only one were grown up, one would know all about these things! She dropped her hand on her side. Perhaps, even grown-up people didn't know all. - Perhaps only God knew what lights and shadows were! (176)

In an essay published a year after her death (177), Schreiner writes of a childhood experience which seems to be the memory which inspired the child Rebekah's 'island' dream:

When a child, not yet nine years old, I walked out one morning along the mountaintops on which my home stood. The sun had not yet risen, and the mountaingrass was heavy with dew; as I looked back I could see the marks my feet had made on the long, grassy slope behind me. I walked till I came to a place where a little stream ran, which further on passed over the precipices into the deep valley below. Here it passed between soft, earthy banks; at one place a large slice of earth had fallen away from the bank on the other side, and it had made a little island a few feet wide with water flowing all round it. It was covered with wild mint and a weed with yellow flowers and long waving grasses.. (178)

She recalls the state of great sadness she was in at this time, a moment when "all the world seemed wrong to me." It was not only the sense of the small misunderstandings and tiny injustices of daily life .. but the whole Universe seemed to be weighing on me". (179) She talks of her experiences of cruelty and violence, growing up "in a land where wars were common"; where she saw how "white men used the dark as beasts of labour"; where they subjugated animals to their will and killed them for sport; where she saw bands of convicts going past to work on the roads, and had heard the chains clanking which went round their waists and passed between their legs to the irons on their feet. (180) The child Olive is confused, horrified by such slavery and destruction:

Why did everyone press on everyone and try to make them do what they wanted? Why did the strong always crush the weak? Why did we hate and kill and torture? Why was it all as it was? (181)

Yet as the sun rises and the "little, damp, dark island" is transformed before her eyes into a radiant vision of "almost intolerable beauty", a "curious feeling" comes over her.

It was not what I thought put into exact words, but I seemed to see a world in which creatures no more hated and crushed, in which the strong helped the weak, and men understood each other, and forgave each other, and did not try to crush others, but to help. I did not think of it as something to be in a distant picture; it was there, about me, and I was in it, and a part of it. And there came to me, as I sat there, a joy such as never besides have I experienced .. a joy without limit. (182)

[my emphases]

As the vision vanishes, the child begins to 'think and question', moving from despair and a sense of hopelessness as she realises her smallness - "a tiny, miserable worm, a speck within a speck, an imperceptible atom". (183) - to a microcosmic/macrocosmic awareness of the individual's place within an ever-changing whole:

You cannot by willing it alter the vast world outside of you; you cannot, perhaps, cut the lash from one whip; you cannot stop the march of even one armed man going out to kill; you cannot, perhaps, strike the hand cuff from one chained hand; you cannot even remake your own soul ... the great world rolls on, and you cannot reshape it; but .. in that one, small, minute, almost infinitesimal spot in the Universe, where your will rules, there, where alone you are as God, strive to make that you hunger for real!.. You also are a part of the great Universe; what you strive for something strives for; ... you are moving on towards something..... (184)

This is the restless movement of Schreiner's spiritual quest which energises all her writing, that striving to realise the ideal which was revealed to her in such 'moments of being' through the liberating 'larger atmosphere' of the Karroo. In the allegories and visions of her writing she could create that 'compelling world of possibility', that "somewhere, sometime, someplace" (185) where dream could become reality.

CHAPTER V 'ONE WOMAN KNOWN TO MANY OF US':

WRITING FOR SELF, FOR OTHERS

- The novelist talks, as an individual to individuals, in a small personal voice. (Doris Lessing) (1)
- I am a woman giving birth to myself. (feminist poster) (2)
- ... to express myself, for myself and to myself alone. (Olive Schreiner) (3)

All three of Schreiner's novels are strongly autobiographical. All three begin rooted in the formative experiences of her own childhood. All three explore, enlarge upon, recreate incidents, thoughts and feelings which we find scattered throughout her personal correspondence. Clearly writing, for her, was a compulsive process of self-discovery and self-expression. Yet this was a function of her work she was often at pains to deny. "I must think and I must produce as long as I live, but that is for my self. It is against this feeling that I have to fight." (4) Significantly, in this letter to Carpenter, a curious mixture of self-affirmation and self-denial, she sees Karl Pearson as a necessary stimulus, directing her work outwards. "[He] was so good for me", she muses. "Just for a little time while I was near him he woke up my ambition .. my wish to express myself to others." Having acknowledged the need to 'fight' against writing for herself, she suddenly announces:

I know what I am and what I can do, what does it matter to me what any other person says?.. I've just finished a beautiful dream (to me) well why should I sit and write it out now?

Such self-assertion is unusual for Schreiner; the tone is of guilty defiance.

She continues hastily:

The only reason I go on writing out at all now is because I want to get a lot of money to help other people to do their work. Oh I live [sic] other peoples work. I feel ambitious about that...

Again and again in her correspondence she returns to such reasons for writing, voicing the need to nurture, to aid, to alleviate suffering

and bring about communication and understanding:

- The work of my life is to try and teach women to love one another. (5)
- I want, in my life's work ... to show that a wonderful power love has over the physical and through it over the mental nature, over what we call the soul, the inner self. (6)
- .. work, work, work, if only one keeps one's reason, that is all in life. Then one can help other women from suffering as one has done oneself. (7)
- .. I have always built upon the fact that From Man to Man will help other people, for it will help to make men more tender to women, because they will understand them better; it will make some women more tender to others; it will comfort some women by showing them that others have felt as they do. Now if I were to let it fall to the ground I should feel that so much of my life had been wasted, gone for nothing. (8)

Expressed in these terms, with an emphasis on suffering, emotional support, giving, caring, Schreiner seems to be using writing as a means of demonstrating the very 'femaleness' she so often sought to reject as a writer, as Ralph Iron who was 'not a woman really'. In her letters she frequently voices, then sets aside, her own feelings of conflict and inadequacy, her own awareness of oppression and her own state of ill health, to concentrate on the suffering through social injustice of others. Writing to Edward Carpenter from Italy, she describes an incident in which she was mistaken for a prostitute, "one of those unhappy women from Monte Carlo". Feelings of outrage and alienation increase her sense of solidarity with her "poor sisters":

It's when I think of those women Edward that I feel I am a woman, and I'm glad I am a woman so that I may fight and there may be none of us any more at last. That is really the work of my life... (9)

Just as her own suffering as an outsider inspired an identification with such women whose position in society was similarly ambiguous and undefined, so her traumatically brief experience of maternity reinforced a life-long desire - stemming also from her own early feelings of motherlessness and her sister Ellie's death - to give and to nurture. Fourteen years after the birth and death of her baby girl she was writing to her husband:

You know I feel to anything that is oppressed or hurt just exactly as I felt to my little baby. I was lying on the bed and thinking of her, how I held her after she was dead, and then for the first time I realised how absolutely identical my feeling for her was with what I feel for anything oppressed. It is a feeling deeper-seated in one's nature than all argument or self-interest... (10)

Again there is the swing from potential exploration of a profoundly moving personal experience to a generalised altruism, a feeling for the lost baby is swallowed up by a feeling 'for anything oppressed'. Schreiner defines this, somewhat vaguely, as 'deeper-seated in one's nature' than 'self-interest', which she seems to regard suspiciously as a self-indulgent state of being. But interestingly, the letter continues with an admission of loneliness, an appeal from the heart of a needy woman rather than a writer with a social conscience and maternal spirit:

I'm lonely here but dear Anna is coming to-morrow. She and I are going to see a bioscope and she is going to sleep with me here in your bed. Isn't that nice? Close personal affection takes the place to me of all sports and amusements and dancing and all the things most people want. I'd rather live in a little ganger's cottage on eight pounds a month all my life with someone who loved and wanted me than in a palace with ten thousand a year and books and music and travel thrown in. (11)

This is a portrayal of sisterhood at a personal and intimate level seldom revealed in Olive's correspondence. Such a frank demand to be 'loved and wanted' - without accompanying self-accusation of weakness or inadequacy - is also rare. Other letters constantly equate cries for affection with selfishness, failure:

- I would like to be so good that everything that I loved and that loved me was better and nobler and stronger for that love, but now it isn't so. I am so selfish. I'm not content to love. I want to be loved back again .. One would barter all one's knowledge for one kiss and all one's intellect for one tender touch - just one... (12)
- God knows I am so weak, and not a human soul puts out its hand to help me, only to demand love from me, and I am bankrupt, I am dying, I have nothing more to give ... You will think this is a cowardly letter... (13)
- You know all I have suffered in my life has been my own fault nearly. If I had been wise and unselfish I wouldn't have suffered.. (14)

And in 1889 she confessed to W. T. Stead, (the journalist who mounted a campaign against child prostitution):

Some years ago I couldn't see a little tiny baby without an inclination to burst out hysterically crying, and to see a happy husband and wife with their children seemed to wake in me the same unaccountable feeling. Now I have entirely conquered it. I know my work and have accepted my little work in life. (15)

Why, for an unusually sensitive and perceptive woman as Schreiner, is such an emotional reaction 'unaccountable'? Any why must it be controlled, repressed, 'entirely conquered'? Her confused feelings about her role as writer and woman are strongly evident in such confessions and evasions.

Realising that her childlessness excluded her from "that crowning beatitude of the woman's existence", as she proclaimed motherhood to be in Woman and Labour (16), she sought to convince herself that through writing, her 'little work in life', she could fulfil her maternal instincts by working for others, for the oppressed, the down-trodden, the needy. The London prostitutes she investigated academically and with whom she became involved emotionally were for her "just like big children". (17) She cared about, and for, them; she also, as we have seen, identified with them as oppressed and abused sisters. In a sense, then, she played out the roles of both mother and child in her relationship to society just as she developed such structures within close personal friendships, notably with Havelock Ellis, her 'other self'/baby, nurse/patient.

Ellen Moers has seen this drawing of parallels between the personal condition of the woman writer and that of other classes and races suffering oppression - this "outreaching of the feminist impulsion", as she calls it - as the

essence of the 'epic age' phenomena; this submersion of private, brooding, female resentment ... in the Christian humanitarianism which, for women and men both, was the major current of Victorian thought.

In this she sees the 'epic age' as sharply distinguished from the ages of women's literature which preceded it - the "passionate feminism" of an



earlier day exemplified by Mary Wollstonecraft, one of Schreiner's own heroines - and separate also from the ages which followed it, "including Virginia Woolf's - and our own". (19)

What Moers fails to emphasize here, with these definite divisions between traditions of female writing and her inclusion of both women and men in this cultural wave of 'humanitarianism', is the particular pressure on women to conform to and develop this 'outreaching' relationship with society, devaluing themselves in the process, through identification with the maternal role. This role which Adrienne Rich has defined as "the old, institutionalized, sacrificial, 'mother-love' which men have demanded" (20), has affected the woman-writer's relationship with her work and herself from Wollstonecraft to Woolf, and has only now become a central issue to be openly discussed, as well as creatively explored, in women's writing today.

What is interesting and intriguing about Schreiner and her work is that although she did, in her view of who and what her writing was for, succumb to this 'submersion of private, brooding female resentment' in humanitarian, social amelioration, she could also react against it. She was aware of her own needs and conflicts and was able to articulate these demands and this tension through her writing, both fictional and polemical. Her own peculiar brand of feminism contains a mixture of Victorian selflessness and 'modern' inclination inwards towards the self. It seems to me to be a particularly dynamic expression of personal politics, in spite of - or perhaps even because of - its loopholes and incongruities, its eccentricities which continually marked Olive as a person apart throughout her life.

There is an awareness in her work and her letters, a feeling hinted at, groped towards, of the fact that we are none of us, as Rich has pointed out, "'either' mothers or daughters":

to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both. Women, mothers or not, who feel committed to other women, are increasingly giving each other a quality of caring

filled with the diffuse kinds of identification that exist between actual mothers and daughters. Into the mere notion of 'mothering' we may carry, as daughters, negative echoes of our own mother's martyrdom, the burden of their valiant, necessarily limited efforts on our behalf, the confusion of their double messages. But it is a timidity of the imagination which urges that we can be 'daughters' - therefore free spirits - rather than 'mothers' - defined as eternal givers. Mothering and nonmothering have been such charged concepts for us, precisely because whichever we did has been turned against us.

To accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and the daughter in ourselves is no easy matter, because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split, to polarize, these images, and to project all unwanted guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, onto the 'mother' woman. But any radical vision of sisterhood demands that we integrate them. - (21)

In the diversity of her attitudes towards women, and her different modes of expressing that 'guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom', Schreiner represents that split and polarized woman - the 'free spirit' and the 'eternal giver' - recognizable to all of us. Through this chapter's examination of those attitudes, and her views of and aspirations for woman's changing role in society, I hope to reveal the importance of her contribution towards such a 'radical vision of sisterhood' and such necessary integration.

Feminism, as defined by Mary Evans in her collection of 'Readings on the Subordination of Women', is "a critical examination of the present, or past, situation of women: a challenge to the majority of values that are presented to women about themselves". (22) Such a critique and a challenge is Schreiner's Woman and Labour, in which she uncompromisingly puts forward her demands for "new fields of labour and a reconstruction of our relationship with life". (23)

From the judge's seat to the legislator's chair; from the statesman's closet to the merchant's office; from the chemist's laboratory to the astronomer's tower, there is no post or form of toil for which it is not our intention to attempt to fit ourselves; and there is no closed door we do not intend to force open; and there is no fruit in the garden of knowledge it is not our determination to eat. Acting in us, and through us, nature we know will mercilessly expose to us our deficiencies in the field of human toil, and reveal to us our

powers. And, for today, we take all labour for our province! (24)

This is the 'insistent' and 'inspiring' voice which summoned Vera Brittain (25) and many other women of the early twentieth century to embrace feminism, and has continued to echo the demands and desires of succeeding generations despite the social and economic changes which have affected the position of woman in our society since then.

Originally ~~part of a large and ambitious study of the Woman Question~~ which "touched on most matters in which sex has a part" (26) and which was ~~destroyed by fire in Schreiner's abandoned Johannesburg house during the Boer War,~~ the book is "a remembrance mainly drawn from one chapter" (27) of the larger work, "a collection of musings on some of the points connected with woman's work". (28) "It is not even a birds-eye view of the whole question of woman's relation to labour", Schreiner assures us hastily, self-deprecatory, in her introduction, and proceeds to list the aspects apart from the problem of 'sex-parasitism' - the issue dominating Woman and Labour - which seem to her "quite as pressing": the need to re-evaluate women's domestic work within society so that it be "most highly recognised and recompensed" (29); to become aware of the "humanising and civilising" effect of "an increased sense of sexual and paternal responsibility" within the family (30); to change man's attitude towards women working outside the home, who are nevertheless still "bound hand and foot, not by the intellectual or physical limitations of their nature, but by artificial constrictions and conventions" (31); to ensure equal pay for work "equally well performed by a man and by a woman". (32)

The most radical feature of Schreiner's observations on women and work which becomes immediately clear in this introduction, and is followed up throughout the book, is her insistence on changing, 'reconstructing', our 'relationship to life' as women through an awareness of the interconnectedness of 'public' and 'private' realms. Abolition of patriarchal

oppression could be achieved not merely through economic change but also through a new understanding of sexual relationships. This was not a new idea, although it did set her apart from many feminists of the time who saw female suffrage and wider employment opportunities as the key to women's liberation. Schreiner wrote to her friend, Mrs. Francis Smith, that "long ages must pass before we really stand free and look out on a world that is ours as well as man's. The poor little political franchise is just a tiny, little, wee step towards it". (33)

However, writers like Ellis, Carpenter and Ibsen were also exploring the issue of female sexuality and its place within a patriarchal, capitalist system. Influential feminist campaigners like the Americans Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Emma Goldman realised, with Schreiner, that emancipation implied more than the overthrow of capitalism and economic independence for women, in spite of the centrality of that issue in their political work. Claiming 'all labour for our province' was not enough if the old standards in sexual relationships - woman as mother/sexual commodity - prevailed. Real freedom, according to Goldman,

should make it possible for women to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves for assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression, all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery. (34)

Unlike these feminists who stressed the personal, subjective face of freedom in their work, fervent socialists like Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling stated categorically that "the position of women rests, as everything in our complex society, on an economic base". (35) Similarly, Engels announced that "the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry". (36) This in turn, he continued, "demands the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society". "The modern individual family is founded on

the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules." (37) This issue of the nuclear family as a contributory factor in the continuing oppression of women is not one which Schreiner takes up in Woman and Labour, as First and Scott critically point out (38), although she does advocate shared child care within the existing unit and, like Engels, looks back favourably at "the old communistic household" (39) of the pre-industrial age when women's duties were more diverse and as much a part of the public and social structure as men's.

Perhaps Schreiner's lack of analysis of the family, or any exploration of radical alternatives, in her framework of 'reconstruction' is due in part to her personal experience of an early break-up in her own family. Maybe this remained too painful an area of her private life to confront in any 'political' sense. Due to her father's bankruptcy and her parents consequent inability to support her, Olive was moved, at the crucially formative age of twelve, to live in a substitute home with her older brother and sister Theo and Ettie, and younger brother Will. As a 'mother-figure' the sternly religious Ettie seems to have reinforced the bitterness, the lack of understanding and anger, that had existed between the young Olive and Rebecca. That was the first of many unsettling moves in her adolescence. First and Scott note how "she had to be passed between the homes of family members, relatives and friends until she was of an age to be hired formally as a governess". (40) And as a governess she was to live on the periphery of 'proper' family groups, caring for other couples' children. Rebecca Schreiner was acutely conscious that others were "offering her a home when I [have] none for myself and so none to offer my child". (41)

Is it any wonder that in later correspondence Olive was constantly expressing wistful envy of her friends' mothers, children, husbands,

families, and that in her work she tended both to glorify motherhood while also portraying her characters as feeling 'unmothered' (Baby Bertie, Undine), as motherless (Waldo, 'Diogenes'), or as orphans? (Lyndall and Em) Step-mothers and daughters abound in her writing; in her portrayal of split-up family groups and the tension in relationships between adults and children, older and younger women within communal households in all three novels, her work has a strangely modern flavour.

Patricia Meyer Spacks has noted that "In nineteenth-century novels women express hostility toward their mothers by eliminating them from the narrative; twentieth-century fiction dramatizes the conflict." (42) Like Emily Dickinson, who also stated that she 'never had a mother', (43) Schreiner tried to negate her mother, eradicate her - and her influence, all she represented - from her life, and her writing: "The little mother" of From Man to Man may begin the Prelude in her "agony of child-birth", but it is the sisters we see at its end lying together in bed closely entwined, their hands "interlocked". Their mother is mentioned briefly in passing at points throughout the novel but remains a shadowy figure, certainly no source of emotional support for the two sisters. Rebekah 'mothers' 'Baby' Bertie, who later flees from her aunt, a stern female guardian, into a submissive relationship with the elderly Jew, finding refuge in a desperate parody of maternity in an attempt to care for deprived children (44) and kittens. (45) Once married Rebekah rapidly becomes the 'little mother' herself:

It was just four full years since Rebekah married, and now she was coming to visit them for the first time, bringing with her the three small children, the eldest of whom was three years and three months old, and the youngest a newborn baby of eight weeks. She had almost died when it was born .. Of late years she had often not written long letters ... she seemed always to be having a baby or nursing it, or to be otherwise engaged. (46)

Throughout the novel she struggles to maintain her autonomy, preserve the privacy of her room of her own, her inner space, for a different type of

female 'creativity'. In her own life Schreiner found, like many other women before and after her, that she could not fully reconcile the role of wife with that of the writer.

If she does in one sense, 'eliminate' mothers, the natural mothers of her heroines, from her work they are, in another sense, constantly there, a part of Undine, and Lyndall and Rebekah's ambivalent feelings towards their own female identity, a part of their consciousness of motherhood, of domesticity as a trap, a part of their frustrated aspirations for themselves and other women: Adrienne Rich has interpreted Dickinson's statement of motherlessness as meaning that she felt herself "deviant, set apart, from the kind of life her mother lived; that what... most concerned her, her mother could not understand". (47) Certainly this was true for Schreiner. She could describe her mother admiringly as being 'just like a man' and know that this detached, self-reliant woman finally came to value her achievements: "she loves me, not because I am her daughter, but because I am an artist". (48) Yet this fact doubtless reinforced her split sense of being a writer/woman, female/male-identified, independent/needy. Although she remained in touch with her mother throughout her life, they remained politically and psychically estranged.

While I do not want to jump to too many glib, psychoanalytical conclusions here, it is intriguing to see how closely Schreiner fits Rich's description of a 'motherless' woman, and to realise how this came out in her relationships and her writing:

The woman who has felt 'unmothered' may seek mothers all her life - may even seek them in men... But the 'motherless' woman may also react by denying her own vulnerability, denying she has felt any loss or absence of mothering. She may spend her life proving her strength in the 'mothering' of others ... In a sense she is giving to others what she herself has lacked; but this will always mean that she needs the neediness of others in order to go on feeling her own strength. She may feel uneasy with equals - particularly women. (49)

Patricia Meyer Spacks may make a definite and valid distinction between nineteenth and twentieth century fiction, with the 'elimination' of mother/daughter conflict in the earlier writing and the 'dramatization' of it in women's later work. But in many ways Schreiner's writing can be seen to bridge the two with her many different expressions of woman's inner conflict.

There are obvious parallels to be drawn between her heroines and Doris Lessing's Martha Quest. Giving herself over to a characteristic "agony of adolescent misery"; Martha feels that "her mother was hateful, all these old women hateful, every one of these relationships, with their lies, evasions, compromises, wholly disgusting" (50). So too does the young Undine react on her introduction to the company of adult women, and gossip and pettiness. ("I wish I was not a woman. I hate women; they are horrible and disgusting, and I wish I had never been born rather than to be one." (51)) And later, at a mixed tea-party of Leftist intellectuals, Martha feels detached, uncomfortably ambivalent about the women there:

Martha heard that fierce and passionate voice repeating more and more loudly inside her, I will not be like this; for, comparing these intelligent ladies, who nevertheless expressed resentment against something (but what?) in every one of their voices, every movement of their bodies, with the undemanding women of the district, who left their men to talk by themselves while they made a world of their own with cooking and domesticity - comparing them, there could be no doubt which were the more likeable. And if, like Martha, one had decided to be neither one nor the other, what could one be but fierce and unhappy and determined? (52)

That resentment against some undefined power or quality of life, that fierceness, unhappiness yet 'determined' sense of purpose, are characteristics of Schreiner's heroines and their creator. So too is the sense of fragmentation Martha battles with: "it was as if half a dozen entirely different people inhabited her body" (53) .. ("Sometimes I really don't know whether I am I or one of the others" - Schreiner writing of the characters in From Man to Man in a letter to Ellis (54)) .. bound together



by only one thing, a strong impulse of longing; anonymous, impersonal, formless, like water". (55) (Rebekah's "vague, insatiable hunger"? (56)) Like Rebekah, Martha finds motherhood a dangerous threat to her sense of self. Like Olive's own mother, Mrs. Quest's experience of colonial life has been "hard and disappointing" (57), and she must see maternity as her saving grace. She must, in turn, impose this ideal on her daughter who demands more:

... Martha must sacrifice herself to her children as she had done... 'You won't have time for all your ideas when the baby is born, believe me!'

To which Martha reacted with a cold, loathing determination that she must keep brightly burning that lamp above the dark blind sea which was motherhood. She would not allow herself to be submerged... (58).

In her writing Schreiner seems to swivel uncomfortably between a sense of its/her specialness - hence her fiction's strong autobiographical content, her heroine's 'determined' isolation and demands - and a justification of its social worth and meaningfulness to others, particularly to other women. Spacks talks of the "narcissism" of female autobiographers, their "claim to uniqueness", and in this portrayal of such writers we can recognize much of Olive Schreiner, who nevertheless resisted 'pure' autobiography as a form of expression:

The women of this sort who have, despite their 'selflessness', written about themselves, consistently reveal an anger which creates the energy of self-castigation to prevent undue self-assertion ... they are unable to suppose that getting their man will solve their problems. Their anger focusses most often on the mother whose controlling rebukes of budding egotism forced the child's ego into retreat. But the child finds devious ways of expression. Female autobiographers suggest many shapes of anger, many forms of expressive fantasy. Their anger emerges more unequivocally than anger usually does in novels, where the demands of fictional form urge resolution, the reconciliations of plot contain dangerous energies. [Perhaps a clue to the convenient deaths of Undine and Lyndall as a 'way out' of the novel, and the inability to ever finish From Man to Man?] They demonstrate repeatedly the special difficulty of female self-discovery and the temptation to ignore what it seems impossible to confront ... (59)

It is Schreiner's interweaving of her own self-discovery as a woman with a process of political analysis which makes Woman and Labour such a

fascinating and highly individual piece of polemical writing. Her vivid personality is imprinted from the start on this 'bible of the Women's Movement'; her inconsistencies, omissions, contradictions, insights serve, for me, to raise the writing up from dry didacticism to a stimulating level of argument which entertains, bemuses and challenges by turn. As Sheila Rowbotham has commented: "The difference in her approach is not so much in what she said but the way she said it." (60)

"I have always felt it necessary almost fiercely to crush down indignation and to restrain it, if I would maintain an impartiality of outlook"; announces Schreiner as she fumes over the inequality of the sexes in her introduction... (61). This is the voice of the woman who wrote to Karl Pearson: "I believe when I am eighty injustice that tries to defend itself by illogical argument will always make me double up my fists just like it did when I was a tiny child." (62) As she outlines the historical causes of women's changing position in society and dwells on the personal and social consequences of 'sex-parasitism', the peculiar passivity of the labourless bourgeois woman, as she examines the relationship between the labour movement and the feminist campaign, between women and war, analyses sexual differences and finally reinforces her arguments by raising and answering 'Certain Objections', her indignation channels itself into table-thumping rhetoric, lyrical evocation and description, interposed with apt allegorical tales, personal anecdotes and witty, acerbic asides. There is the occasional submersion in sentimentality ("the army of rosy milkmaids has passed away for ever ..." (63)), or the suddenly revealed bigotry to which Schreiner was prone ("the abnormal institution of avowed inter-male sexual relations" (64)) which dates the work and detaches the reader; there are the lapses into sweeping generalisation and exaggeration ("deep and over-mastering ... lies the hunger for motherhood in every virile woman's heart!" (65)) which are characteristics

Schreiner was noted for amongst friends\* (and which continually irritated her exacting husband). But overall the reader is swept along by the passionate prose, an oddly persuasive mixture of intimacy and propaganda.

Another marked tendency throughout the work is to illustrate her argument by means of the natural metaphor, a reflection, no doubt, of her own close affinity with the natural world as well as the Darwinian impulse to establish evolutionary, organic connections. In her Thoughts on South Africa she wrote:

As those vast herds of antelope which at times sweep down across our South African plains from the north, bearing all before them, are propelled, not by any logical induction, the result of an intellectual process, but are driven onwards, whether they will or no, by the pressure of a stern fact which forces itself painfully on the consciousness of each isolated individual in the herd - the fact, that behind lie parched deserts desolated by drought, while before are green-lands; - so nineteenth-century women are urged on by the pressure of a condition which they have not created, and of whose nature they have not even in many cases a clear intellectual perception, yet which acts upon the whole mass, causing irresistible social movement through its pressure on each isolated unit... (66)

This vision of the feminist movement as something herd-like, natural, instinctive (the description itself is one huge, onward-rushing sentence) is emphasized again and again in the third chapter of Woman and Labour,

\* Her niece, Lyndall Gregg, tells an amusing anecdote illustrating this in her Memories of Olive Schreiner:

Like many people of genius, my aunt could exaggerate refreshingly. I remember her one Sunday in London, arriving to lunch with us ... full of complaints about the difficulty of catching a bus - queues were yet to come.

'There was a struggling crowd; she declared, 'and old ladies covered with blood!'

'Oh no, darling, not covered with blood', someone protested.

'Yes, they were', with a defiant grin.

See Lyndall Gregg (Dot Schreiner), Memories of Olive Schreiner (W and R Chambers, 1957), p.65.

where Schreiner illustrates its "vital", "spontaneous", "wholly organic and unartificial" characteristics:

When a star-fish lies on the ground at the bottom of a sloping rock it has to climb, it seems to the onlooker as though there were nothing which could stir the inert mass and no means for taking it to the top. Yet watch it. Beneath its lower side, hidden from sight, are a million fine tentacles; impulses of will from the central nerve radiate throughout the whole body, and each tiny fibre, fine as a hair, slowly extends itself, and seizes on the minute particle of rough rock nearest to it; now a small tentacle slips its hold, and then it holds firmly, and then slowly and slowly the whole inert mass rises to the top. (67)

Schreiner celebrates the diversity contained within the movement as a whole, the 'million fine tentacles', seeing that factions and sub-groups "forms divergent and at times superficially almost irreconcilable" (68) contribute to its strength and dynamism, alligning it to other "vast re-organising movements of humanity" (69). She sees the pressing need to bring into "close harmony and co-operation" (70) the "male labour question" and the women's movement. She defines the two movements, male and female, somewhat simplistically, as arising from, on the one hand, the "poor and hard-labouring classes" and on the other, "almost .. exclusively among the wealthy, cultured, and brain-labouring classes". (71) Her failure here to pay tribute to the working-class women who took an active part in both movements is disappointing, although she does acknowledge the double oppression under which such women labour in her final chapter. Here she makes the pertinent point that the most committed socialist male was not necessarily the model radical 'New Man':

those males most actively employed in attempting to re-adjust the relations of the mass of labouring males to the new conditions of life are sometimes precisely those males who are most bitterly opposed to woman in her attempt to readjust her own position. (72)

- an observation still unhappily shown to be true in the machismo, and reactionary attitudes and structure, revealed in some sections of the trade union movement today. Having acknowledged the similarities in

"origins" and some "methods of procedure" however, Schreiner sees the Woman's Movement as set apart from "the large mass of economic movements", placing it rather in line with "those vast religious developments which at the interval of ages have swept across humanity, irresistibly modifying and reorganising it". (73)

Consistently then, Schreiner is equating female political potential with mystical, 'natural', illogical, creative, instinctual, nurturing, co-operative qualities. "Mere intellectual comprehension may guide, retard, or accelerate the great human movements", she asserts, but "it has never created them". (74) "The very strength of the feminist movement and its continuing impetus lies in its multi-formity, the fact that it is not governed by "the arbitrary will of individuals". Again, the natural metaphor, the sea imagery:

An Alexander might will to weld a Greece and an Asia into one; a Napoleon might resolve to create of a diversified Europe one consolidated state; and by dint of skill and determination they might for a moment appear to be accomplishing that which they desired; but the constraining individual will being withdrawn, the object of their toil has melted away, as the little heap of damp sand gathered under the palm of a child's hand on the sea-shore, melts away, scattered by the wind and washed out by the waves, the moment the hand that shaped it is withdrawn; while the small, soft, indefinite, watery fragment of jelly-fish lying beside it, though tossed hither and thither by water and wind, yet retains its shape and grows, because its particles are bound by an internal and organic force. (75)

These very images - the delicate belittling of the egotism of male power through that one small, moulding, ineffectual child's hand, contrasted with the similarly 'small, soft, indefinite' jelly-fish, vulnerable yet surprisingly resilient because of the 'internal and organic force' - serve to reinforce Schreiner's celebration of female strength. While we can see her definition of 'feminine' qualities, such as selflessness and irrationality, as part of her Victorian inheritance/indoctrination, we can also admire her reclaiming of areas of female experience, and particularly of the male-

defined role of mother and the close connection of woman and nature, which are today also being re-evaluated and explored by feminist theorists like Mary Daly and Susan Griffin.

Schreiner's linking of the past with possible models for the future, and her admiration for pre-industrial, more 'matriarchal' societies in which woman-centred work and experience played a dynamic part in community life, is echoed in feminists' concern and interest now in exploring women's history and reclaiming myths and legends of 'Goddess worship'. In turn, this cult of the Earth Mother has been viewed suspiciously from within the Women's Movement itself as being indulgently middle-class or dangerously, ~~possibly~~ reactionary; woman's maternal function has, after all, been for so long ~~the~~ the root of our oppression that such ritualistic celebration of female creativity can seem simply like role-playing on male terms, serving to strengthen the female/Nature, male/Culture polarity in society.

Adrienne Rich has seen this in terms of a culturally reinforced split between body and mind, in her study of motherhood:

The physical organization which has meant, for generations of women, unchosen, indentured motherhood, is still a female resource barely touched upon or understood. We have tended either to become our bodies - blindly, slavishly, in obedience to male theories about us - or to try to exist in spite of them.. [as Schreiner so desperately attempted to do, dosing herself with bromide to 'curb' her sexual feelings; denying her femaleness altogether; battling against asthma in order to write] Many women see any appeal to the physical as a denial of mind. [hence feminist distrust of the 'mother cult'] We have been perceived for too many centuries as pure Nature, exploited and raped like the earth ... small wonder if we now long to become Culture: pure spirit, mind. Yet it is precisely this culture and its political institutions which have split us off from itself ... It is this culture and politics of abstraction which women are talking of changing, of bringing to accountability in human terms. (76)

Sherry B. Ortner has analyzed the polarization of the sexes, the culture/nature split which Rich sees reinforced within women themselves, in an essay which attempts to explain the universal devaluation of women and to

ask why women tend to be assumed to be 'closer to nature' than men. (77)

Drawing heavily on the work of Nancy Chodorow (78), Ortner isolates the three main factors which "make women appear to be rooted more directly and deeply in nature":

Woman's physiology, more involved more of the time with 'species of life'; woman's association with the structurally subordinate domestic context, charged with the crucial function of transforming animal-like infants into cultured beings; 'woman's psyche', appropriately moulded by mothering functions by her socialization and tending toward greater personalism and less mediated modes of relating... (79)

In Woman and Labour Schreiner makes much of the links between woman's physiology and nature, seeing woman's body and most particularly her reproductive functions as a point of entry into "spheres of sensation, perception, emotion, desire, and knowledge which are not, and cannot be, absolutely identical": (80) Consistently she stresses woman's difference from, not inferiority, to man. While she does not challenge radically the "structurally subordinate domestic context" as far as the family unit is concerned (for complex reasons to do with her own 'psyche' and 'socialization' already noted), she does advocate changes in the unequal and institutionalized structure of child-care, and is, as she makes clear in her chapter on sex differences, peculiarly aware of the artificial process of society's 'moulding' of male and female:

The intelligence, emotions, and desires of the human infant at birth differ not at all perceptibly, as its sex may be male or female; and such psychic differences as appear to exist in later childhood are undoubtedly very largely the result of artificial training, forcing on the appearance of psychic sexual divergencies long before they would tend spontaneously to appear; as where sports and occupations are interdicted to young children on the ground of their supposed sexual unfitness; as when an infant female is forcibly prevented from climbing or shouting, and the infant male from amusing himself with needle and thread or dolls. Even in the fully adult human, and in spite of differences of training, the psychic activities over a large extent of life appear to be absolutely identical. The male and female brains acquire languages, solve mathematical problems, and master scientific detail in a manner wholly indistinguishable: as illustrated by the fact that in modern universities the papers sent in by

male and female candidates are as a rule absolutely identical in type. Placed in like external conditions, their tastes and emotions, over a vast part of the surface of life, are identical; and, in an immense number of those cases where psychic sex differences appear to exist, subject to rigid analysis they are found to be purely artificial creations, for, when other races or classes are studied, they are found non-existent as sexual characteristics; as when the female is supposed by ignorant persons in modern European societies to have an inherent love for bright colours and ornaments, not shared by the male; while experience of other societies and past social conditions prove that it is as often the male who has been even more desirous of attiring himself in bright raiment and adorning himself with brilliant jewels; or as when, among certain tribes of savages, the use of tobacco is supposed to be a peculiarly female prerogative, while in some modern societies, it is supposed to have some relation to masculinity. (81)

[cf. Lyndall in *African Farm*: "They begin to shape us to our cursed end... when we are tiny things in shoes and socks... (82)]

Olive's living out in her personal life of such well-argued theories of equality proved difficult, if not impossible at times, due as much to her ambiguous feelings about femaleness and motherhood - which I shall explore further - as to culturally-defined limitations. Such struggle comes out more obviously in her fictional writing - the complex personalities of Undine, Lyndall and Rebekah exemplifying it - and in her letters; her own 'female', 'natural' tendency towards 'greater personalism' in her writing also lets her own temperament and feelings break through the more detached polemic of Woman and Labour. Yet here her optimistic hopes for social and personal transformation remain to the fore.

Ortner's conclusion that:

various aspects of woman's situation (physical, social, psychological) contribute to her being seen as closer to nature, while the view of her as closer to nature is in turn embodied in institutional forms that reproduce her situation. (83)

can be found too in Schreiner's work. She also realises that change must imply interconnections; as Ortner puts it:

a different cultural view can only grow out of a different social actuality; a different social actuality can only grow out of a different cultural view...



Ultimately, both men and women can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women be seen as aligned with culture in culture's ongoing dialectic with nature. (84)

Schreiner continually stresses this need for co-operation between the sexes throughout Woman and Labour, as in this metaphorical example reminiscent of the message of 'Three Dreams in a Desert':

The males and females of each human society resemble two oxen tethered to one yoke: for a moment one may move slightly forward and the other remain stationary; but they can never move farther from each other than the length of the yoke that binds them; and they must ultimately remain stationary or move forward together. (85)

She also expresses woman's movement towards sexual and social transformation as an inevitable moving outwards, an expansion, a breaking of limits. "The New Woman will no longer be confined, physically or psychologically, in the "crabbed, walled-in, and bound conditions surrounding woman at the present day" (86) declares Schreiner. Her description of the multifaceted nature of the feminist movement reflects the interconnectedness of personal and political freedom:

The fact that, at one point, it manifests itself in a passionate, and at times almost incoherent, cry for an accredited share in public and social duties; while at another it makes itself felt as a determined endeavour after self-culture; that in one land it embodies itself mainly in a resolute endeavour to enlarge the sphere of remunerative labour for women; while in another it manifests itself chiefly as an effort to recoordinate the personal relation of the sexes; that in one individual it manifests itself as a passionate and sometimes noisy struggle for liberty of personal action; while in another it is being fought out silently in the depth of the individual consciousness - that primal battle-ground, in which all questions of reform and human advance must ultimately be fought and decided; - all this diversity shows, not the weakness, but the strength of the movement; which ... is a movement steady and persistent in one direction, the direction of increased activity and culture, and towards the negation of all possibility of parastism in the human female. Slowly, and unconsciously, as the child is shaped in the womb, this movement shapes itself in the bosom of our time, taking its place beside those vast human developments, of which men, noting their spontaneity and the co-ordination of their parts, have said, in the phraseology of old days, 'This thing is not of man, but of God'. (87)

Once more Schreiner makes the connection between the spiritual essence of the feminist movement and femaleness through her use of maternal imagery. Seeing all women in terms of their potential motherhood forms a crucial part of her campaign to reinstate an "able and labouring womanhood" in society (to produce, of course, an "able and labouring manhood" (88)), and finally rid it of the "fine lady", the "human female parasite - the most deadly microbe which can make its appearance on the surface of any social organism". (89) (Again the scientific terms are doubtless Darwin-inspired; for the modern reader they may well conjure up rather ridiculous cartoon-like images, the sort of thing used to illustrate Health Education leaflets...) Such imagery is often determinedly physical, as if in direct contrast to the effete 'fine lady', languid and useless, scented and ornamented in her boudoir:

No man ever yet entered life farther than the length of one navel-cord from the body of the woman who bore him. It is the woman who is the final standard of the race ... as her brain weakens, weakens the man's she bears; as her muscle softens, softens his; as she decays, decays the people. (90)

This central portrait of woman as 'mother of the people' continues to loom rather alarmingly large in the text as Schreiner builds up to her section on Woman and War. She alerts her reader to the "great, central fact" that

with each generation the entire race passes through the body of its womanhood as through a mould, reappearing with the indelible marks of that mould upon it, that as the os cervix of woman, through which the head of the human infant passes at birth, forms a ring, determining for ever the size at birth of the human head, a size which could only increase if in the course of ages the os cervix of woman should itself slowly expand; and that so exactly the intellectual capacity, the physical vigour, the emotional depth of woman, forms also an untranscendable circle, circumscribing with each successive generation the limits of the expansion of the human race... (91)

This kind of insistent emphasis on female reproductive capability calls to mind those celebratory carved figures of tribal fertility goddesses; it also reflects the growing race consciousness of the time, the patriotic

concern after the loss of life in the Boer War to 'restock' the nation's manhood\* (which was, of course, to increase after the horrors of the First World War and doubtless was part of the appeal of Woman and Labour to women like Vera Brittain). More insidiously Schreiner's emphasis echoes the eugenics research being carried out by Pearson and others which led on to the 'pure' racist philosophy behind the National Socialist movement in Germany. Empire-building and maternity became inextricably linked in the nation's consciousness. In spite of their "larger outlook on life", wrote a Dr. R. Murray Leslie in 1911 in the Eugenics Review, the "new women" of the twentieth century were less fit than their foremothers "to become the mothers of a stronger and more virile race [words frequently used throughout Woman and Labour]; able to keep Britain in its present proud position among the nations of the world". Does the new woman's knowledge of mathematics, or "even her efficiency in athletics" qualify her as a superior mother when compared to "the natural bright, intelligent girl interested in frills, dances and flirtations?" the worried doctor demands. 'Nature' is continually referred to as arbiter of what is right and proper. Here, by some quirk of male logic, the 'natural' woman is fascinated by 'frills and flirtations'; not for her the presumably 'unnatural' pursuits of maths and sport.

Womanliness is disassociated in men's and also in most women's minds with either intellectual power or physical development, but is .. associated with certain passive qualities, such as sympathy and tenderness ... which best find their expression in the domestic sphere and more particularly in the roles of wife and mother ... May it not be that the manliness of men and the womanliness of women are .. but the modern expression of Natural Selection? (92)

\* The poor physical condition of recruits was also a determining factor in the greater emphasis on good motherhood and racial health. In 1899, 330 potential soldiers out of every 1,000 were rejected, as unfit for service due to heart problems, weak lungs, rheumatic tendencies, flat feet.

See Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood' in History Workshop Issue 5, Spring 1978, p.15.

If Schreiner does fall prey to such racist and sexist propaganda at times and also holds up "our ancient Mother Nature" (93) rather indiscriminately as a determining factor in her vision of a new age to come, it is decidedly not her sole concern to portray woman simply as proud bearer of the race or mere 'mould' for mankind. She also, as we have seen, was vocal about the dual responsibility of the sexes for social and personal change and growth - "male and female must march side by side, acting and reacting on each other" (94) - and insistent about woman's right to choose for herself her area for fulfilment in life. While celebrating the peculiarly 'feminine' qualities which strengthened the Women's Movement, she is also at pains to stress that the possession of those very qualities - such as intuition, compassion, sensitivity - does not necessarily indicate a lack of other, so-called 'masculine' attributes, such as intellect, rationality, determination. There is no evidence, past or present, to suggest that there is any relation between "intellectual aptitudes" and "sexual functions", she tells the reader (95):

And even were it proved by centuries of experiment that with the possession of the uterine function of sex tends to go exceptional intellectual capacity in the direction of mathematics rather than natural history, or an inclination for statecraft rather than for mechanical invention; were it proved that, generally speaking and as a whole, out of twenty thousand women devoting themselves to law and twenty thousand to medicine, they tended to achieve relatively more in the field of law than of medicine, there would yet be no possible healthy or rational ground for restricting the activities of the individual female to that line in which the average female appeared rather more frequently to excel...

That one male Froebel should be prohibited or hampered in his labour as an educator of infancy, on the ground that infantile instruction was the field of the female; that one female with gifts in the direction of state administration, should be compelled to instruct an infants' school, perhaps without the slightest gift for so doing, is a running to waste of social life-blood. (96)

Schreiner uses the language of the (male) social scientist - 'no possible healthy or rational ground', 'a running to waste of social life-blood' -

and her message is serious; at the same time the tone is delightfully mocking. Echoing an example, much used by feminist theorists and historians now, illustrating male fear and suspicion of women's power - the persecution of witches - Schreiner states, grimly humorous:

Throw the puppy into the water: if it swims, well; if it sinks, well; but do not tie a rope round its throat and weight it with a brick, and then assert its incapacity to keep afloat.. (97)

Unfettered from patriarchal prejudice and restriction there is, however, one male-dominated area of culture into which woman will not step, asserts Schreiner; indeed, when true equality is achieved it will no longer exist:

.. when the woman takes her place beside the man in the governance and arrangement of external affairs of her race will also be that day that heralds the death of war as a means of arrangement. (98)

Like Jane Addams, one of the founders of the Women's Peace Party in the United States, who believed in a universal feminine instinct for pacifism governed by the biological function of giving birth and nurturing the race (99) Schreiner felt strongly that "the knowledge of woman, simply as woman, is superior to that of man; she knows the history of human flesh; she knows its cost". (100) (As Lyndall stated emphatically in African Farm to Waldo: "We bear the world, we make it." (101)) This determined Schreiner's antipathy to war. She does acknowledge that war can be justified if it is to "preserve life, or land, or freedom" (102), and pays tribute to the "unparasitised and labouring women" who have for such causes lost their lives. She does not, however, credit woman with "a deeper moral insight", an "inherent all-round moral superiority", or "naturally ... any higher social instinct" than man merely because of the "sexual function of maternity" (103) - and, to prove the point, draws our attention to the fact that

the two terms signifying intimate human relationships which in almost all human languages bear the most sinister and antisocial significance are both terms which have as their root the term 'mother', and denote feminine relationships - the words 'mother-in-law' and 'step-mother'. (104)

This seems a curious failure on Schreiner's part to remain attentive to the constraints of man-made cultural conditioning. Surely the point to be made here would be to draw attention to the 'sinister significance' of such derogatory terms used to impose a sense of moral inferiority on women. Perhaps this slip-up, and her uncritical acceptance of misogynist use of language, point simply to her own ambivalent and at times antagonistic attitude towards her own mother...

Just as in her story 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine' she made links between women's strength, their reproductive capabilities, their nurturing qualities and the land and birth/death cycle of nature, so she describes woman's sense of wasted life as she views a scene of the destruction of battle:

There is, perhaps, no woman, whether she have borne children, or be merely potentially a child-bearer, who could look down upon a battlefield covered with slain, but the thought would rise in her, 'So many mother's sons'. So many months of weariness and pain while bones and muscles were shaped within; so many hours of anguish and struggle that breath might be; so many baby mouths drawing life at woman's breasts; - all this, that men might lie with glazed eyeballs, and swollen bodies, and fixed, blue, unclosed mouths, and great limbs tossed-this, that an acre of ground might be manured with human flesh, that next year's grass or poppies or Karroo bushes may spring up greener and redder, may have a glint of white bones! (105)

In spite of the rather mawkish Victorian sentimentality of the declamatory style, the implication that the actual mother is superior to the 'mere' potential childbearer, and the sense that the suffering of childbirth, its 'weariness and pain', its 'anguish and struggle' is somehow womanly and noble, the passage is undoubtedly powerful, with its chilling contrast of the formative, suckling babies and the lifeless men with their 'glazed eyeballs', 'swollen bodies' and 'blue, unclosed mouths'.

Schreiner's fervent belief that, for women, our "relationship to war is ... intimate, personal, and indissoluble" because of our capability to produce its "primal munition" (106) remains one of the basic tenets of the women's peace movement today. She would recognise and appreciate the symbolism of women pinning up photographs of their children, clothes, and personal mementos on the boundary fences of the cruise missile base at Greenham Common in Berkshire. Yet in her own time, and particularly during the war years, she discovered that her strongly-felt pacifism alienated her from friends and feminists alike. In 1915 she wrote sadly to her friend, Mrs. Mary Murray Parker:

I feel almost afraid of meeting my friends now because I am a strong peace person, and have been since I was nine years old, and I find my friends have all become war people, so that meeting them makes me sad, by a sense of our infinite division in our outlook on human life. (107)

Her mention of the age of nine here suggests that her pacifist feelings were linked in some way with her sister's death, a time also strongly connected with a development of her maternal emotions, her need to 'mother' others. (cf. 'The Child's Day' in From Man to Man.) During these early childhood years she also suffered physical cruelty at the hands of her mother (108); Marion Friedmann sees a connection between this early experience of power abuse and Olive's later "revulsion from aggression" which must have represented for her "the old struggle, in which the aggressor was always a mother and the victim always a child". (109) The child Olive quickly learnt to direct her anger inwards; Friedmann notes how she felt that

she had to bite her hands or knock her head during an asthmatic attack. She told her husband that when, as a child, she was 'angered or worried or unjustly treated, she used to get under the bed and bang her head against the wall until she was almost senseless'. (110)

However, perhaps healthily, throughout her adult life her temper remained uncontrollable. The 'war people' amongst her acquaintances were

often drawn into violent argument by Olive, unable to contain her anger within 'peaceful' boundaries of expression. Olive Renier humorously recalls her meeting as a young child with this daunting "small square lady with fierce eyes", and describes the scene at "some wartime winter breakfast":

Aunt Olive holds strong pacifist views. My mother, reluctantly, supports the war. Since both ladies are made miserable by the slaughter, and since they are very fond of each other, they become exceedingly angry. This, and the fog, brings on Aunt Olive's asthma. She thumps the table and coughs and orates. I huddle appalled into my chair... (111)

Despite her own, characteristically passionate, explosions of anger she did not approve of the militancy of the suffragettes with their direct political action, the smashing of windows and arson attacks. "I loathe these war-like women!" she rages, in a letter to John Hodgson. "She [Mrs. Pankhurst, or 'Pancerst' as she typically misspells her name] came out to South Africa during the war and tried to urge the English on in their most merciless courses towards the Boers." (112) She admits, in a later, more considered note, that she thinks Mrs. Pankhurst "one of the strongest and cleverest women" she has ever met. "But naturally when she is passionately war-like, and I am all for peace we cannot have much in common..." (113)

It seems odd, then, that in Woman and Labour Schreiner should look back proudly to our 'Teutonic' foremothers who

barefooted and white robed, led their Northern hosts on that long march to Italy ... animated by the thought that they led their people to a land of warmer sunshine and richer fruitage. (114)

[Again the link between mothering and nurturing, woman and the earth.]

These women were of "martial spirit", Schreiner tells us (115); they were "virile and could give birth to men". (116) On her marriage morning a woman of such people received from her husband "no contemptible trinket to hang about her throat or limbs, but a shield, a spear, a sword, and a yoke



of oxen". (117) It seems ironic, points out Joyce Avrech Berkman, "that such an exponent of racial equality and plurality did not draw from non-European sources" for examples of female strength. Telling too, that a staunch pacifist and "critic of physical prowess as a criteria of fitness should, during the years of sabre rattling among European nations, have hailed the martial traits of the female Teutonic warriors". (118)

The fact is, Woman and Labour abounds with such examples of Schreiner's ambivalence about the implications of physical force, about woman as carer/nurturer and assertive self-discoverer, about woman's ultimate fulfillment through child-bearing and yet also within an equal sexual relationship with man which would have "distinct aesthetic, intellectual, and... spiritual functions and ends, apart entirely from physical reproduction". (119) While the white, middle-class institutionalized ideal of the Mother as part of a perfected monogamous unit comes through in her writing, so too does her personal anger and confusion and profound sense of injustice. Liz Stanley writes that "what she is doing in Woman and Labour, as in her allegories, is to isolate key issues, ideas, phenomena, the better to analyse them and thus to become aware of their likely future consequences". (120) This suggests a more clear-cut piece of work that I feel Woman and Labour to be, considering the personal tension invested in it, yet Stanley is right to draw attention to Schreiner's clarity of purpose, which she reveals in her 'Introduction' and 'Certain Objections', and to stress the wider implications of the work of which Schreiner herself was well aware.

While she devotes a great deal of her treatise to an analysis of sex-parasitism - which she acknowledges to be a minority condition characterizing principally middle and upper-class women - she also effectively puts forward her sense of its far-reaching relevance, both to social structures and personal relationships. She also alerts the reader to the fact that

much more than half the world's most laborious and ill-paid labour is still performed by women, from tea pickers and cocoa tenders in India and the islands, to the washer women, cooks, and drudging labouring men's wives, who in addition to the sternest and most unending toil, throw in their child-bearing as a little addition.. (121)

In a similar cutting tone, she pinpoints the patronising male attitudes which further such subjection of one half of the species by conjuring up for us a "lofty theorist" who

to-night stands before the drawing-room fire in spotless shirt-front and perfectly fitting clothes, and declaims upon the amplitude of woman's work in life as child-bearer, and the mighty value of that labour which exceeds all other, making it unnecessary for her to share man's grosser and lower toils.. (122)

The sharp sarcasm, and evocation of this pompous example of middle-class masculinity is a perfect vehicle for Schreiner's anger and wit. Will this man, she demands, on waking the next day to find that "the elderly house drudge, who rises at dawn while he yet sleeps to make his tea and clean his boots, has brought his tea late, and polished his boots ill" simply exclaim magnanimously:

Divine child-bearer! Potential mother of the race! Why should you clean my boots or bring up my tea, while I lie warm in bed? Is it not enough you should have the holy and mysterious power of bringing the race to life? Let that content you. Henceforth I shall get up at dawn and make my own tea and clean my own boots, and pay you just the same! (123)

Pointedly Schreiner reveals the complacent hypocrisy behind the Victorian ideal of woman, and the male's fear and suspicion of women who threaten to destroy that illusion. For it is not the

haggard, work-crushed woman and mother who irons his shirts, or the potential mother who destroys health and youth in the sweater's den where she sews the garments in which he appears so radiantly in the drawing-room which disturbs him. (124)

The charwoman does not "fill him with anguish for womanhood" for to him "that somewhat quadrupedal posture is .. truly feminine, and does not interfere with his ideal of the mother and child-bearer". (125) It is the woman as legislator, as Greek professor, as doctor that "distressed him deeply":

It is not the labour, or the amount of labour, so much as the amount of reward that interferes with his ideal of the eternal womanly; he is as a rule quite contented that the woman of the race should labour for him, whether as tea-pickers or washer women, or toilers for the children he brings into the world, provided the reward they receive is not large, nor in such fields as he might himself at any time desire to enter. (126)

Schreiner realized such smug self-deceit and covert cruelty in her fiction through her characters of Frank in From Man to Man, and Albert Blair in Undine, men who both oppress their 'little women', Rebekah and Undine - who in turn, both demand and reject such domination. It seems significantly relevant to her own personal experiences of relationships with men that Drummond, her one attempt at a portrayal of New Manhood, never materialized similarly as a living, credible character. Her lively illustrations of patriarchal attitudes in Woman and Labour - along with the 'lofty theorist' she presents also the preening pomposity of the "parasitic male", "almost invariably fond of dangling a sword .. and wearing some kind of uniform" (127) - give way finally to a hasty acknowledgement of men's contribution to women's struggle towards liberation. Indeed, it is not, we are suddenly told, "man as man who opposes the attempt of woman to readjust herself to the new conditions of life"; that opposition comes, remarks Schreiner, "perhaps more often, from the retrogressive members of her own sex". (128) And, she tells us,

There is no door at which the hand of woman has knocked for admission into a new field of toil but there have been found on the other side the hands of strong and generous men eager to turn it for her, almost before she knocks. (129) [my emphases]

This seems to be an instance when Schreiner is writing as if to convince herself, and make sense of her own experience as a woman, without fully confronting the source of her own, deep-seated hostility towards such 'retrogressive members of her own sex' (the tone is deliberately detached, almost clinical in its attempt at disassociation), or recognizing that her own sexual inclination towards such 'strong and generous' and

dominating men fostered her inability to regard herself as their equal.

"We are continually translating out own immediate fragmented sense of what we feel into a framework which is constructed by men", observes

Sheila Rowbotham in Woman's Consciousness, Man's World.

The particular sensations of women have the quality of the exceptional .. This gives female consciousness an elusive and disintegrating feeling. We are the negative to their positive. We are oppressed by an overwhelming sense of not being there. (130)

Throughout her life Schreiner strove to 'translate' her feelings into her own female-written 'frameworks'. Yet her sense of identity, of a self which both aspired towards and rejected the man's world, was frequently 'elusive' and 'disintegrating'—a feeling reinforced by the almost continual state of 'disintegration' of her physical health. She too, from her relationship with her mother and with women like her, who found Olive's determined self-assertion threatening; could see the female within herself as 'other', as something to be despised, trodden down. When her desire to be 'not a woman, really' and her struggle to overcome her sense of 'not being there' became too much for her, she could retreat into a fantasy of herself as the feminine 'norm', the Victorian female for whom the door will be opened with patronising courtesy, 'almost before she knocks'. But, as the resilient voice behind Woman and Labour shows, she could also find herself in the writer who inspired a generation of women to demand "labour and the training that fits us for labour" (131), and proclaim confidently that for such strong, assertive, self-determining women "there is no closed door we do not intend to force open". (132)

The principal message of Woman and Labour remains for me ultimately one of positive affirmation of woman's potential. This is best encapsulated in an allegory Schreiner uses in her final chapter to illustrate "on what grounds many of us base our hope and our certitude with regard to the future of woman". (The "our" here is used not as a literary mode of objective detachment, the 'royal' 'we', but with a sense of sisterhood.):

There was a bird's egg once, picked up by chance upon the ground, and those who found it bore it home and placed it under a barn-door fowl. And in time the chick bred out, and those who had found it chained it by the leg to a log, lest it should stray and be lost. And by and by they gathered round it, and speculated as to what the bird might be. One said, 'It is surely a waterfowl, a duck, or it may be a goose; if we took it to the water it would swim and gabble.' But another said, 'It has no webs to its feet; it is a barn-door fowl; should you let it loose it will scratch and cackle with the others on the dung-heap'. But a third speculated, 'Look now at its curved beak; no doubt it is a parrot, and can crack nuts!' But a fourth said, 'No but look at its wings; perhaps it is a bird of great flight'. But several cried, 'Nonsense! No one has ever seen it fly'. 'Why should it fly? Can you suppose that a thing can do a thing which no one has ever seen it do?' And the bird - the bird - with its leg chained close to the log, preened its wing. So they sat about it, speculating, and discussing it: and one said this, and another that. And all the while as they talked, the bird sat motionless, with its gaze fixed on the clear blue sky above it. And one said, 'Suppose we let the creature loose to see what it will do?' - and the bird shivered. But the others cried, 'It is too valuable; it might get lost. If it were to try to fly it might fall down and break its neck'. And the bird, with its foot chained to the log, sat looking upward into the clear blue sky, in which it had never been - for the bird - the bird, knew what it would do - because it was an eagle!

There is one woman known to many of us, as each human creature knows but one on earth; and it is upon our knowledge of that woman that we base our certitude. (133)

It seems fitting that this allegory should have been chosen as an introduction to a chapter, 'Dangerous Dreams', in a recently published collection of letters between mothers and daughters. (134) Unable to discuss with her mother her own 'dangerous dreams' for the future of feminism, Olive channelled them into her writing, tried simultaneously to live them out in her life. As a writer and as a woman she came up against limitations, which she confronted or denied. As a mother, as a daughter, as a sister, as a wife, she worked through many different forms of writing towards an integration of self and society. Convinced that "a better, nobler time is coming for women" (135) she spoke out courageously against social oppression during a lifetime of inner conflict with a 'small personal voice' which remains startlingly clear today.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

CORRESPONDENCE

Sources of Schreiner's correspondence cited frequently in the Notes are abbreviated as follows:

- Letters S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner (ed.), The Letters of Olive Schreiner, (Fisher Unwin, 1924).
- Carpenter MSS Letters from Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, Sheffield City Library Archives Division.
- Pearson Papers and Correspondence of Karl Pearson (1857 - 1936), held in the University College Library, London.

INTRODUCTION

1. Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, (Panther, 1973), introduction, pp.21-22.
2. Dale Spender, Women of Ideas (and what men have done to them), (Ark Paperbacks, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp.23-24.
3. Ruth First and Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner, (André Deutsch, 1980).
4. Elizabeth Wilson, 'Re-reading Lessing and de Beauvoir' in Jenny Taylor (ed.), Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives. Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p.73.
5. Nicole Ward Jouve, 'Of mud and other matter - The Children of Violence', in Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives, p.75.
6. quoted in Patricia Hollis, Women in Public: The Women's Movement 1850 - 1900, (Allen and Unwin, 1979), p.234.
7. The Story of an African Farm, (Penguin, 1982), p.188.
8. Dan Jacobson, Introduction to Penguin ed. of The Story of an African Farm, p.11.
9. Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas, (Penguin, 1977), p.162; (original ed. Hogarth Press, 1938)
10. letter to Karl Pearson; 13 July 1886. Pearson.
11. Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, (Virago, 1978), p.195.
12. Liz Stanley, 'Olive Schreiner: New Women, Free Women, All Women', in Dale Spender (ed.), Feminist Theorists, (The Women's Press, 1983), pp.229-243.
13. *ibid.*, p.231.
14. letters to Karl Pearson; May and July, 1886. Pearson.

15. to Havelock Ellis; 29. May 1886. Letters, p.100.
16. Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower', in The Moment and Other Essays, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York; London, 1948), p.129.
17. Michelene Wandor, 'Olive Schreiner', in Touch papers, (Allison and Busby Ltd., New York; London, 1982), pp.91-92.

CHAPTER I: The heroines: broken and untried possibilities?

1. letter to Havelock Ellis, 24. January 1888. Letters, p.129.
2. to Ellis; 15. December 1884. Letters, p.50.
3. I shall never be a mathematician, nor a man of science, nor making vast discoveries, nor a great leader of the masses, nor people bound to them in love and sympathy and giving them voices; I shall never be the mother of ten or a dozen children, creating them and feeling their dear, soft little hands on me; I shall never find out if I have the power for music I have always felt I have; I shall never know if that craving to paint I have had since I was a little child was the craving of power; in my poor little handful of life which consists now mainly of cooking and house-cleaning I shall know few things; I am only a broken and untried possibility ...  
  
letter to Ellis; Johannesburg, 25 July 1899. Letters, p.227.
4. Rebecca West, 'So Simple' in The Freewoman, 12. October, 1912.
5. Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing, (rev. ed. Virago, 1978), p.215.
6. The Story of an African Farm, (Penguin, 1982), P.284.
7. Undine, (Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York, 1972), p.20.
8. *ibid.*, pp.12-13.
9. For an interesting discussion on Schreiner's asthma see pp.23-27 in Marion V. Friedmann's Olive Schreiner: A Study in Latent Meanings, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1955).
10. Undine, p.19.
11. African Farm, p.183.
12. From Man to Man, (Virago, 1982), p.478.
13. radio programme on Winifred Holtby, BBC Radio 4, 5 January 1984.

14. see African Farm, Part II, Chapter 4, p.118:

the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us  
by the ends it sets before us. To you it says -  
Work; and to us it says - Seem!...

cf. Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,  
(Everyman edition, with J. S. Mill's The Subjection of Women, reprint,  
1982), pp.108-109:

It is this system of dissimulation ... that I despise.  
Women are always to seem to be this and that - yet  
virtue might apostrophise them, in the words of  
Hamlet - Seems! I know not seems! Have that within  
that passeth show!

15. African Farm, p.107.
16. Undine, p.14.
17. From Man to Man, p.67.
18. Undine, p.14.
19. African Farm, p.38.
20. Undine, p.11.
21. Charlotte H. Bruner (ed.), Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa, (Heinemann, 1983), p.109.
22. Undine, p.48.
23. ibid., p.84.
24. ibid., p.49.
25. ibid.
26. ibid., p.34.
27. ibid.
28. ibid., pp.39-40.

Marion Friedmann analyses what she sees as Schreiner's "oral obsession", bringing it finally back to her favourite point of interpretation of Schreiner, her relationship with her mother, and here the "infantile feeding situation". Still, she makes some interesting connections:

One cannot ignore the strange mouth behaviour of Olive's characters. Margaret bites Undine, Lyndall bites herself, Undine chews and swallows the letter in which Albert jilts her, characters in allegories drink human blood, and wound or poison by biting (e.g. 'The Sunlight Lay ...' and 'Three Dreams in a Desert'). The children offer sacrifices of food to God. All the central characters



and many of the minor ones give away material goods; Undine, giving away wealth, also gives away food when she is starving. Her death is as much attributable to starvation as to anything else. By behaving as they do, these characters seem to be punishing themselves or others. Bonaparte's punitive activities on the farm are described in chapter-headings as follows: 'He Shows His Teeth'; 'He Snaps'; 'He Bites',

Olive Schreiner: A Study in Latent Meanings, p.54.

To this could be added an amusing anecdote about Olive recalled by her niece, Lyndall Gregg, in her Memories of Olive Schreiner (W. and R. Chambers, 1957), p.25:

Willie [her elder brother] also brought with him some tales of their life at Matjesfontein. He described how he and Aunt Olive used to go for walks along the railway line, and collect the pieces of coal dropped by the passing engines; he added the amazing information that Aunt Olive, to whom he had become devoted, actually ate paper. Whilst with her, he had his sixth birthday, and received a wire from home, the first of his life and correspondingly precious. But, in the evening, it could not be found. He and Aunt Olive searched everywhere, and then she cried suddenly: 'Oh, my darling boy! I am so sorry, but I must have eaten it!' A soggy lump in a corner proved to be the missing treasure. For not only did Olive Schreiner compose aloud, striking the palm of one hand with the other fist, but she liked something to chew as she walked up and down...

29. Undine, p.127.
30. ibid., p.93.
31. ibid., p.137.
32. ibid., p.138.
33. ibid., p.178.
34. ibid., p.183.
35. ibid., pp.187-188.
36. ibid., p.307.
37. ibid., p.345.
38. ibid., p.363.
39. ibid., p.364.
40. ibid., p.374.

41. African Farm, pp.186-187.
42. to Ellis; Bole Hill, 18 July, 1884. Letters, p.33.
43. African Farm, pp.47-48.
44. *ibid.*, p.185.
45. Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, p.198.
46. African Farm, p.184.
47. *ibid.*
48. *ibid.*, p.196.
49. *ibid.*, p.237.
50. *ibid.*, p.197.
51. *ibid.*, p.206.
52. *ibid.*, p.207.
53. D. L. Hobman, Olive Schreiner, Her Friends and Times, (Watts, and Co., 1955), p.54.
54. Johannes Meintjes, Olive Schreiner; Portrait of a South African Woman, (Hugh Keartland Ltd., Johannesburg, 1965), p.57.
55. *ibid.*, p.57.
56. African Farm, p.210.
57. Ruth First and Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner, (André Deutsch, 1980), p.106.
58. African Farm, p.284.
59. *ibid.*, p.270.
60. *ibid.*, p.241.
61. Mirrors constantly occur in Victorian female fiction. Discussing the impetus to self-hatred and to self-destruction that figures prominently in twentieth century writing, Ellen Moers, in her study Literary Women, notes that giving

visual form to the fear of self, to hold anxiety up to the Gothic mirror of the imagination, may well be more common in the writings of women than of men ... nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply and more early in life than the compulsion to visualize the self.

see Ellen Moers, Literary Women, (The Women's Press, 1978), p.107.

(Lyndall makes the same observation while lecturing Waldo: "we look into our own great eyes. Then the curse begins to act on us..." African Farm, p.189.)

Moers goes on to quote from Christina Rossetti's 'A Royal Princess':

All my walls are lost in mirrors  
whereupon I trace  
Self to right hand, self to left hand,  
self in every place,  
Self-same solitary figure, self-same  
seeking face.

The claustrophobic sense of self-oppression here is very close to Schreiner's experience. Lyndall's ambivalent feelings are reinforced in the glass. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in The Female Imagination, (Allen and Unwin, 1976), p.143, analysing a similar 'mirror scene' in Wuthering Heights - a novel often compared to African Farm - notes that for women "reflections always contain danger: at one extreme of narcissism; at the other, of self-knowledge".

62. First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, p.106.
63. to Ellis; 21 July 1884. Letters, pp.33-34.
64. to S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner; 23 May 1907. Letters, p.268.
65. In a poem by Michelene Wandor about Schreiner, the tensions and frustrations of the writing process for her are movingly portrayed:

... she wanted, she wanted

she beat her hands  
against her temples,  
she prayed to be able  
to finish, oh, only  
to finish, to finish another book

she wore the ground  
into slouts  
of eternity  
pacing up and down, down  
and up  
her own army  
with nowhere to go  
always in training  
always geared to high-squeak  
readiness, the only problem  
being that the order never  
really came...

'Olive Schreiner' in Touch papers, (Allison and Busby Ltd., London; New York, 1982), pp.91-92.

66. to Ellis; 12 July 1884. Letters, p.28.
67. to Ellis; 2 February 1889. Letters, p.153.

68. From Man to Man, p.105.
69. *ibid.*, p.240.
70. *ibid.*, p.241.
71. *ibid.*, pp.243-244.
72. *ibid.*, p.299.
73. *ibid.*
74. *ibid.*, p.300.
75. *ibid.*
76. *ibid.*, p.301.
77. Friedmann, Latent Meanings, p.3.
78. From Man to Man, p.158.
79. *ibid.*, p.86.
80. *ibid.*, p.226.
81. *ibid.*, p.310.
82. *ibid.*, p.67.
83. *ibid.*, p.415.
84. *ibid.*, p.457.
85. *ibid.*, pp.458-459.
86. *ibid.*, p.476.
87. *ibid.*, p.476-477.
88. *ibid.*, p.479.
89. First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, p.175.
90. From Man to Man, p.461.
91. *ibid.*, p.481.
92. see First and Scott, p.20.
93. *ibid.*, p.17.
94. Dale Spender, Women of Ideas (and what men have done to them), (Ark Paperbacks, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp.28-29.
95. Johannes Meintjes, Olive Schreiner: Portrait of a South African Woman, p.38.

96. Dan Jacobson, introduction to Penguin edition of African Farm, p.176.
97. From Man to Man, p.176.
98. Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination: A Literary and psychological investigation of women's writing, (Allen and Unwin, 1976), p.307.
99. First and Scott, p.22.
100. Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, (Panther Paperbacks, 1973), Preface, p.11.
101. *ibid.*, p.7.
102. *ibid.*
103. *ibid.*, p.9.
104. Dale Spender, Women of Ideas, p. 648.
105. *ibid.*, p. 655.
106. Adrienne Rich, 'Transcendental Etude', in The Dream of a Common Language, (W.W. Norton and Co., New York; London, 1978), pp.72-77.
107. *ibid.*

CHAPTER II: 'But I'm not a woman ...'

Stereotypes and self-image I

1. Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, (Virago, 1978), p.12.
2. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1985).
3. *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
4. First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, p. 175.
5. DuPlessis, p.29.
6. *ibid.*, pp.28-29.
7. Ann Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society, (Temple Smith, 1972), p.16.
8. DuPlessis, p.63.
9. Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920, (Methuen, 1981), p.xii, Introduction.
10. Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, p. 13.
11. *ibid.*
12. See Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis (Pluto Press, 1977), p.12  
and Edward Carpenter: Selected Writings. Vol. 1: Sex, (Gay Modern Classics, Gay Men's Press, 1984), pp.39-40.
13. Noel Greig, Introduction to Edward Carpenter: Selected Writings. Vol. 1.
14. *ibid.*, p.11.
15. Edward Carpenter, My Days and Dreams, (Allen and Unwin, 1916), p.197.
16. Carpenter, 'Woman in Freedom' in Love's Coming-of-Age, (1896), cited in Gay Modern Classics edition of his Selected Writings, p.123.
17. *ibid.*
18. Selected Writings, p.112.
19. *ibid.*, pp.130-131.

20. Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, The Evolution of Sex (1889), cited in Jill Conway's 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution' in Martha Vicinus (ed.), Suffer and Be Still, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1972), p.144.
21. Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Vol. 1, part II (Random House, New York, 1936), p.253, cited in Phyllis Grosskurth, Havelock Ellis, (Quartet, 1981), p.231.
22. see Grosskurth, p.231.
23. From Man to Man, p.272; see also my third chapter, p.83.
24. Carpenter, 'Man, the Ungrown' in Love's Coming-Of-Age, cited in Selected Writings, p.108.
25. African Farm, p.184.
26. cited in Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, (Croom Helm Ltd., 1982), p.120.
27. Carpenter, Love's Coming-Of-Age, cited in Selected Writings, pp.59-60.
28. Carpenter, My Days and Dreams, (1916), p.197.
29. letter to Ellis; 2 February 1889. Letters, p.153.

30. Carpenter, 'Woman the Serf' in Love's Coming-Of-Age, cited in Selected Writings, p.159.
31. Carpenter, 'On Preventive Checks to Population', ibid., p.181.
33. Rowbotham and Weeks, Socialism and the New Life, p.112.
34. ibid., pp.112-113.
35. Carpenter, 'The Free Society' in Love's Coming-Of-Age, cited in Selected Writings, p.177.
36. Liz Stanley, 'Feminism and Friendship: two essays on Olive Schreiner', p.6.
37. letter to Edward Carpenter; Alassio, 12 April 1887. Carpenter MSS.  
It is interesting to compare this letter to an observation made by Ellis and quoted by Cronwright-Schreiner in his The Life of Olive Schreiner, (Fisher Unwin, 1924), p.169: "She likes and needs the society of men; but she feels she has herself something of a man in her nature."
38. to Havelock Ellis; 27 May 1888. Letters, p.135.
39. to Ellis; 30 June 1885. Letters, p.75.
40. to Karl Pearson; 29 June 1886. Pearson.
41. to Pearson; 14 December 1886, Pearson.
42. see The Life of Olive Schreiner, p.153; First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, p.116.
43. to Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner; Hanover, 20 March 1907. Letters, p.265.



44. to Karl Pearson; 20 October, 1886. Pearson.
45. to Edward Carpenter; Alassio, 16 April, 1888. Carpenter MSS.
46. to Louie Ellis; Krantz Plaats, 7. March, 1894. Letters, p.214.
47. Eliza Linton, 'Womanliness' in The Girl of the Period (1883), quoted in Patricia Hollis, Women in Public, The Women's Movement 1850 - 1900, (Allen and Unwin, 1979), p.20.
48. Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens' in Sesame and Lilies (1865), quoted in P. Hollis, Women in Public, p.17.
49. to Carpenter; 12. August. 1887. Carpenter MSS.
50. to Carpenter; Whitby, 5 September, 1887. Carpenter MSS.
51. to Carpenter; Alassio, 16 April, 1888. Carpenter MSS.
52. Johannes Meintjes, Olive Schreiner: Portrait of a South African Woman, p.11.
53. to Ellis; London, 9. July, 1885. Letters, p.76.
54. Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. The precise dating of letters in this collection is difficult to establish. This letter is quoted by Phyllis Grosskurth in her biography of Ellis, Havelock Ellis, (Quartet Books Ltd., 1981), p.76.
55. to Ellis; 26. May, 1884. Letters, p.21.
56. Arthur Calder-Marshall, Havelock Ellis (1959), p.91.
57. First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, p.115.
58. Grosskurth, Havelock Ellis, p.75.
59. Ellis, My Life, (Heinemann, 1940), p.185.
60. *ibid.*, p.185.
61. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Quoted by Grosskurth, p.85.
62. see First and Scott, p.142:

When you are ill I am sad and also happy, then you belong to me. When you are well, I am glad and miserable; you don't belong to me, my heart aches.  
(Ellis to Schreiner)
63. to Ellis; Bole Hill, 29. July, 1884, Letters, pp.35-36.
64. speech to Electoral Reform Conference, 1874, 'Objections to Woman Suffrage' quoted in P. Hollis, Women in Public, p.307.
65. *ibid.*, p.324.

66. see Barbara Scott Winkler's article, 'Victorian Daughters: The Lives and Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Olive Schreiner' in Michigan Occasional Papers, no. XIII, Winter 1980. Here she describes both women as "daughters of the Victorian ideology against which they rebelled".
67. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, (Penguin, 1972), p.75; (orig. ed. 1928)
68. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic, (Yale University Press, New Haven; London, 1979), p.51.
- For a fascinating account of 'the sexual politics of sickness' see chapter four in Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women (Pluto Press Ltd., 1979).
69. <sup>cited by</sup> Ehrenreich and English, Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness, (Writers and Readers Publishing Co-op., 1973), p.33.
70. Wendy Martin, 'Anne Bradstreet's Poetry: A Study of Subversive Piety', quoted in The Madwoman in the Attic, p.56.
71. Karl Pearson himself believed that reproductive powers were reduced by intellectual development and wrote in his lecture on 'The Woman Question' of 1885, "if child-bearing women must be intellectually handicapped, then the penalty to be paid for race predominance is the subjection of women". (in The Ethic of Free Thought, 1901).
- see Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood' in History Workshop, issue 5, Spring 1978, pp.20-21.
72. While I think Marion Friedmann has placed too much emphasis on the mother/daughter relationship in tracing Schreiner's development, I do find her points about Olive's early sense of sin and unworthiness, her rejection of God and her aggression towards her mother, convincing ones. (see Friedmann, Latent Meanings, pp.39-54.) I explore this further in my fifth chapter.
73. The Life of Olive Schreiner, p.13.
74. letter to Cronwright-Schreiner; January 1893; quoted in the Life, p.245.
75. to Ellis; Alassio, 24. April. 1887. Letters, p.115.
76. Life, pp.162-163.
77. To be childlike was wholly in line with Victorian ideology.

One of the ambiguities involved in the Victorian idealization of womanhood is that while the ideal woman was to have womanly strength, she was also to remain permanently childlike, childlike even in maturity.

Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, (Croom Helm Ltd., 1982), p.6.

78. to Ellis; Southbourne-on-Sea, 22 March, 1886. Letters, p.96.
79. to Ellis; Mentone, 18 March, 1889, Letters, p.158.
80. to Carpenter; Mentone, 28. January. 1889, Carpenter MSS.
81. to Carpenter; 21. March, 1889, Carpenter MSS.
82. to Ellis; London, 17. September, 1885, Letters, p.81.
83. to Ellis; Edinburgh, 2. May, 1884, Letters, p.17.
84. to Carpenter; Mentone, 17. December, 1888. Carpenter MSS.
85. The political implications of motherhood are discussed at length in Woman and Labour and I deal more fully with Schreiner's theories expounded there in my fifth chapter.
86. to Ellis; quoted in the Life, p.24.
87. journal entry; 18 December, 1888. see Life, p.182.
88. to Mrs. Cawood; London, 14. May, 1882. Letters, p.10.
89. Life, p.182.
90. to Carpenter; St. Leonards on Sea, 1. August, 1893, Carpenter MSS.
91. to Pearson; Shanklin, 7. February 1886. Pearson.
92. First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, pp.144-172.
93. Betty McGinnis Fradkin, 'Olive Schreiner and Karl Pearson' in Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library, June, 1977, vol. 31, no.4.
94. Carpenter, 'Marriage: a Retrospect' in Love's -Coming-Of-Age, cited in Selected Writings, p.135.
95. to Pearson; 30. January, 1887. Pearson.
96. -ibid..
97. to Pearson; March 1886, Pearson.
98. to Pearson; 3. July, 1886. Pearson.
99. to Pearson; 10 May, 1886. Pearson.
100. to Pearson; 29 June, 1886. Pearson.
101. to Pearson; 8 May, 1886. Pearson.
102. see First and Scott, p.169, footnote.
103. Elizabeth Cobb to H. B. Donkin, 14 December, 1886 Pearson.
104. Pearson, Box 841.
105. to Pearson; 5 April, 1886, Pearson.

106. First and Scott, p.160.
107. *ibid.*, pp.163-164.
108. H. B. Donkin to Karl Pearson; 15 December 1886. Pearson.
109. to Pearson; 14 December 1886. Pearson.
110. *ibid.*
111. First and Scott, p.167.
112. to Ellis; 1 February 1887. Pearson.
113. Duplessis, Writing beyond the Ending, p.66
114. *ibid.*
115. to Ellis; London, 18 August 1885. Letters, p.79.
116. see First and Scott, pp.180-181:

as soon as I met him the deep still joy and delight and satisfaction which his presence gave me came back, and I am quite sure that, if ever I had been compelled to live in the same house with him for six months or a year, it would have ended in my loving him so desperately I would have been obliged to marry him.

to Ellis; Cape Town, 6. July 1907. Letters. pp.270-272.

117. to Carpenter; St. Leonards on Sea, 1. August 1893. Carpenter MSS.
118. to Carpenter; 9 November 1893. Carpenter MSS.
119. to Carpenter; 8 October 1894. Carpenter MSS.
120. to Ellis; 5 January 1885. Letters, p.90.
121. The Life of Olive Schreiner, p.259. Later in life Olive was still deferring to Cron. Rose Ehrlich in her reminiscence, 'London Memories of Olive Schreiner', remembers how

she had a curious way of always quoting her husband, Cronwright-Schreiner, and would say, 'Cron said this' or 'Cron said that', and they were always such wise sayings, that there was never a doubt that they were her own. I think this was her way of building him up.

see Zelda Friedlander (ed.), Until the heart changes: A garland for Olive Schreiner, (Tafelberg-Uitgewers, 1967).

122. to Carpenter; 9 November 1893. Carpenter MSS.
123. D. R. Beeton, Appendix 2 in Olive Schreiner A Short Guide to Her Writings, (Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1974), p.100.
124. *ibid.*
125. G. M. C. Cronwright, 'My Uncle Cron', in Z. Friedlander, Until the heart changes, p.86.

126. *ibid.*
127. Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination, p.77.
- 128.
129. Life, p.206.
130. to Mrs. J. H. Philpot; Mentone, 17. March. 1889. Letters, p.157.
131. Havelock Ellis, 'Eleanor Marx' in The Adelphi, vol. X, no. 6, September 1935, p.343.
132. Yvonne Kapp, Eleanor Marx. Vol. II. The Crowded Years, (Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp.706-709.
133. Ellis, 'Eleanor Marx' in The Adelphi, p.347.
134. to Pearson; 12. March. 1886; Pearson.
135. to Ellis; May. 1884. Letters, pp.18-19.
136. to Ellis; Bole Hill, 2 August. 1884. Letters, pp.36-37.
137. Y. Kapp, Eleanor Marx Vol. II, pp.22-25.
138. Eleanor Marx to Olive Schreiner, 16. June, 1885, quoted by Ellis in his Adelphi article, pp.348-351.
139. Kapp, p.24; p.27.
140. to Mrs. Francis Smith; 14. May, 1904. Letters, p.246.
141. Joyce Avrech Berkman, Olive Schreiner: Feminism on the Frontier, (Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1979), p.59.
142. *ibid.*
143. to Ellis; Aspley Guise, 29. June. 1884. Letters, p.23.
144. to Carpenter; Paris, April, 1888. Carpenter MSS.
145. to Ellis; Harpenden, 3. October, 1888. Letters, p.142.
146. to Mrs. Francis Smith; Cape Town, 27. June, 1908. Letters, p.281.
147. to Ellis; London, 18. May. 1885, Letters, p.74.

### CHAPTER III: New woman, new man?:

#### Stereotypes and Self-image 2

1. Woman and Labour, (Virago, 1978), pp.269-270.
2. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, For Her Own Good, (Pluto Press, 1979), p.13.
3. Woman and Labour, p.268.

4. ibid., p.271.
5. Laurens van der Post, Introduction to William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe, (London 1965), quoted in Christopher Heywood (ed.), Aspects of South African Literature, (Heinemann, 1976), p.xii.
6. quoted by Dr. Jim Dyer, 'How Us beat Them' in The Guardian, 27. February, 1985.
7. see From Man to Man, p.299.
8. Woman and Labour, pp.270-271.
9. Dreams, (Fisher Unwin, 1892), pp.67-85.
10. to Havelock Ellis; 5. December 1884. Letters, p.49.
11. to Mrs. Francis Smith; London, 1918. Letters, p.358.
12. to Mrs. Francis Smith; Cape Town, October 1909. Letters, pp.290-291.  
see also Woman and Labour, footnote to p.161, on "the very exaggerated external sex differences which our unnatural method of sex clothing and dressing the hair produces".
13. to Louie Ellis; Bole Hill, August 1884. Letters, p.39.
14. see letter from Louie Ellis to Olive Schreiner; 24. August 1884; quoted in Ridley Beeton, 'In Search of Olive Schreiner in Texas', in The Texas Quarterly, Autumn 1974, vol. XVII, no. 3, pp.137-138.
15. From Man to Man, p.129.
16. ibid., p.105.
17. ibid., pp.123-124.
18. ibid., p.125.
19. ibid., p.158.
20. ibid.
21. ibid., pp.271-272.
22. ibid., pp.129-131.
23. ibid., p.160.
24. ibid., p.164.
25. ibid., p.62.
26. ibid.
27. ibid., p.229.
28. ibid., pp.107-108.

29. cf. the baking scene, p.112.
30. The Story of an African Farm, p.180.
31. From Man to Man, p.122.
32. *ibid.*, p.320.
33. *ibid.*, p.121.
34. E. M. Forster, Howard's End.
35. Ann Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society, (Temple Smith, 1972), p.16.
36. From Man to Man, p.226.
37. *ibid.*, p.253.
38. *ibid.*, p.290.
39. *ibid.*, p.293.
40. *ibid.*, p.272.
41. *ibid.*
42. *ibid.*, p.288.
43. *ibid.*, p.289.
44. *ibid.*, p.263.
45. *ibid.*, p.298.
46. see Chapter Two, pp.59-60.
47. From Man to Man, p.298.
48. Introduction, p.xvi.
49. First and Scott, Olive Schreiner, pp.172-173.
50. In using the phrase 'kindred souls' I am thinking of Lyndall's words to Waldo:

When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man; I only know that we are both things that think. Other men when I am with them, whether I love them or not, they are mere bodies to me; but you are a spirit...

African Farm, p.210.

Patricia Meyer Spacks, in her analysis of Wuthering Heights, makes some interesting points about the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff which seems in many ways similar to Schreiner's portrayal of Lyndall and Waldo. Cathy considers Heathcliff to be 'an extension

of herself'. "Nelly, I am Heathcliff - he's always, always in my mind - not as a pleasure to myself - but as my own being." see The Female Imagination, (Allen and Unwin, 1976), pp.139-140.

51. African Farm, p.198.
52. ibid., pp.214-215.
53. ibid., p.175.
54. see pp.58-61.
55. ibid., pp.69-73.
56. ibid., p.175.
57. ibid., p.174.
58. ibid., p.207.
59. ibid.
60. ibid., p.176.
61. ibid., p.174.
62. ibid., p.176.
63. ibid., p.197.
64. ibid., p.178.
65. ibid., p.238.
66. to Karl Pearson; 5 April 1886. Pearson.
67. African Farm, p.178.
68. ibid., p.181.
69. I am indebted to Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach's study of women's psychology, Understanding Women, (Penguin, 1985), for furthering my thoughts on this part of Schreiner's psyche. See their exploration of the 'little girl' in woman and mother/daughter relationships. Understanding Women, pp.44-52.
70. African Farm, p.179.
71. ibid., p.181.
72. ibid., p.182.
73. ibid., p.188.
74. Schreiner's curious love/hate relationship with the Boer community comes through strongly here. Although she could mock them when writing to her English friends, talking of "their peaceful cattle-like lives. It seems to me as if all the streets were full of cows and sheep". (to Ellis; Grahamstown, 27 November 1889. Letters, p.172), she



could also write admiringly in her Thoughts on South Africa (Fisher Unwin, 1923) of that same simplicity of outlook which viewed marriage as a practical contract, efficiently managed due to their lack of "intensity of individualized feeling". (see Chapter Five on 'The Boer Woman and The Modern Woman's Question').

Lyndall Gregg, Schreiner's niece, in her reminiscences of her aunt, recounts a tale which surely must have inspired the Little Piet/Tant' Sannie episode:

At the same time when she was writing The Story of an African Farm, Olive Schreiner was teaching on a Boer farm, and she used to tell us, in later years, of the queer things that happened there. How a young farmer came to call and sat beside her on the sofa. At intervals he gave her a sharp nudge with his elbow, and, although she thought this odd at the time, she was astonished when her employer's wife said later, "He has shown you clearly that he wants to marry you."

Memories of Olive Schreiner, (W. and R. Chambers, 1957), p.19.

75. African Farm, p.203.
76. *ibid.*, p.213.
77. *ibid.*, p.236.
78. *ibid.*, p.190.
79. *ibid.*, p.184.
80. *ibid.*, p.213.
81. *ibid.*, p.231.
82. *ibid.*
83. Undine, p.127.
84. African Farm, p.232.
85. *ibid.*, p.235.
86. *ibid.*, p.238.
87. *ibid.*
88. *ibid.*, p.227.
89. *ibid.*, p.231.
90. *ibid.*, p.232.
91. *ibid.*, p.245.
92. *ibid.*

93. *ibid.*, pp.247-248.
94. *ibid.*, p.270.
95. *ibid.*
96. *ibid.*
97. see First and Scott, pp.142-143, for an analysis of this.
98. quoted by First and Scott, p.142.
99. African Farm, p.274.
100. *ibid.*, p.273.(no.8).
101. *ibid.*
102. *ibid.*, p.272.
103. *ibid.*, p.278.
104. *ibid.*, p.279.
105. *ibid.*, p.294.
106. *ibid.*, p.296.
107. *ibid.*, pp.293-294.
108. *ibid.*, p.297.
109. *ibid.*, p.285.
110. Nadine Gordimer, 'English Language, Literature and Politics in South Africa' in Christopher Heywood (ed.), Aspects of South African Literature, (Heinemann, 1976), p.103.
111. Undine, pp.93-94.
112. *ibid.*, pp.94-95.
113. *ibid.*, p.112.
114. *ibid.*, pp.112-113.
115. *ibid.*, p.113.
116. *ibid.*
117. *ibid.*, p.114.
118. *ibid.*, p.108.
119. *ibid.*, p.128.
120. *ibid.*, p.108.

121. *ibid.*, pp.103-104.
122. *ibid.*, p.23.
123. *ibid.*
124. *ibid.*, p.141.
125. *ibid.*, pp.141-142.
126. *ibid.*, p.182.
127. *ibid.*, p.183.
128. *ibid.*
129. *ibid.*, p.185.
130. *ibid.*, p.184.
131. *ibid.*, p.XVIII (Introduction).
132. *ibid.*, p.338.
133. *ibid.*, p.198.
134. *ibid.*, p.231.
135. see Ridley Beeton, 'In Search of Olive Schreiner in Texas', in The Texas Quarterly, Autumn 1974, vol. XVII, no. 3, p.109.
136. Undine, p.172.
137. 'The Policy in Favour of Protection' in Dream Life and Real Life, (Academy Chicago, 1981, reprint of 1909 ed. pub. by Little, Brown, Boston), p.76.
138. *ibid.*, p.73.
139. *ibid.*, pp.82-83.
140. *ibid.*, p.85.
141. *ibid.*, p.70.
142. *ibid.*, p.74.
143. 'On the Banks of a Full River' in Stories, Dreams and Allegories, (Fisher Unwin, 1923), p.91.
144. 'The Policy in Favour of Protection', p.71.
145. 'The Buddhist Priest's Wife' in Stories, Dreams and Allegories, p.73.
146. Dream Life and Real Life, p.71.
147. *ibid.*, pp.80-81.

148. *ibid.*, p.83.
149. *ibid.*, p.86.
150. *ibid.*
151. *ibid.*, p.88.
152. *ibid.*, p.89.
153. *ibid.*, p.90.
154. *ibid.*, pp.49-50.
155. see From Man to Man, pp.39-40.
156. *ibid.*, pp.171-174.
157. *ibid.*, p.175.
158. Dream Life and Real Life, p.62.
159. *ibid.*, p.50.
160. *ibid.*, p.51.
161. *ibid.*, p.51-52.
162. *ibid.*, p.53.
163. *ibid.*, p.54.
164. *ibid.*, pp.54-55.
165. *ibid.*, p.55.
166. Woman and Labour, p.67.
167. Dream Life and Real Life, pp.55-56.
168. *ibid.*, p.56.
169. *ibid.*, pp.56-57.
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An interesting parallel to Schreiner's allegory of the eaglet can be found in a tale George Bernard Shaw tells about the female condition in his The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891):

If we have come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, we have done so exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot - because they have never seen one anywhere else. No doubt there are Philistine parrots who agree with their owners that it is better to be in a cage than out, so long as there is plenty of hempseed and Indian corn there. There may even be idealist parrots



who persuade themselves that the mission of a parrot is to minister to the happiness of a private family by whistling and saying 'Pretty Polly', and that it is in the sacrifice of its liberty to this altruistic pursuit that a true parrot finds the supreme satisfaction of its soul. I will not go so far as to affirm that there are theological parrots who are convinced that imprisonment is the will of God because it is unpleasant; but I am confident that there are rationalist parrots who can demonstrate that it would be a cruel kindness to let a parrot out to fall prey to cats, or at least to forget its accomplishments and coarsen its naturally delicate fibres in an unprotected struggle for existence. Still, the only parrot a free-souled person can sympathize with is the one that insists on being let out as the first condition of its making itself agreeable. A selfish bird, you may say; one that puts its own gratification before that of the family which is so fond of it -- before even the greatest happiness of the greatest number: one that, in aping the independent spirit of a man, has unparrotted itself and become a creature that has neither the home-longing nature of a bird nor the strength and enterprise of a mastiff. All the same, you respect that parrot in spite of your conclusive reasoning; and if it persists, you will have either to let it out or kill it.

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