

*Unfallen Women: Negotiations of Alternative Feminine
Identities in Selected Writings by Olive Schreiner*

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

at

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

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December 2010

Abstract

This study constitutes an inquiry into how Olive Schreiner's peripheral position as a colonial woman writer enabled her rewriting of feminine identity, specifically her subversion of Victorian feminine stereotypes. I focus particular attention on three novels: *The Story of an African Farm* (1890), and the posthumously published *From Man to Man* (1926) and *Undine* (1929).

I employ a feminist literary approach to examine how Schreiner's hybrid identity as a British South African enabled her revisioning of femininity. If Schreiner is situated within the context of her time, it can be demonstrated that her negotiations of feminine identity are influenced by her dual intellectual and cultural heritage. On the one hand, she can be situated within a British tradition of women's writing – in particular, the New Woman fiction which emerged in the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, she can be situated within a nascent South African literary tradition – and demonstrates prototypically post-colonial concerns.

Schreiner's writing style develops out of her colonial heritage and her experiences as a woman living in a patriarchal society. The resultant voice subverts the narrative traditions of the metropolitan novel in an attempt to articulate an alternative view of femininity. I examine in detail how Schreiner undermines and subverts Victorian stereotypes, and focus particular attention on the 'fallen woman' and the 'mother-figure'. She attempts to challenge conventional Victorian conceptions of femininity by erasing the binary between the 'angel' and the 'whore' in order to create a New Woman. In *Undine* and *The Story of an African Farm* the full realisation of this New Woman is deferred, since both protagonists die, but *From Man to Man* is more nuanced, particularly in its emphasis on economic empowerment for women.

Schreiner also destabilises traditional notions of motherhood, in order to offer glimpses of an alternative maternal role. It is my contention that, in her depiction of mother-figures and (un)fallen women, Schreiner challenges stock Victorian notions of femininity and, in the process, creates a space in which new possibilities for women can be imagined and negotiated.

Acknowledgements

A special word of thanks to the following people; I could not have completed this project without you:

My parents and sisters for providing me with love and support.

My supervisors, Ms Courtney Davids, for helping me in the early stages, and Ms Sue Marais, for encouraging me to become a better writer.

My dear friends Kate Bold and Lexi De Coning: you have journeyed with me since first year.

And, finally, to Rheedan Dugmore, my shell.

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1 Introduction

The poet, when his heart is weighted, writes a sonnet, and the painter paints a picture, and the thinker throws himself into the world of thought, and the publican and the man of business may throw themselves into the world of action; but the woman who is only a woman, what has she but her needle? In that torn bit of brown leather brace worked through and through with yellow silk, in that bit of white rag with invisible stitching, lying among the fallen leaves and rubbish that the wind has blown into the gutter or street corner, lies all the passion of some woman's soul finding voiceless expression. Has the pen or the pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?

(Schreiner, *From Man to Man* 322-323)

1.1 Olive Schreiner: A New Woman

A central trope in Victorian literature is that of the ‚pure‘ woman and her antithesis, the ‚fallen‘ woman. George Watt, for example, suggests that “the preservation of female purity is an essential aspect of the unreal Victorian dream”, and that “a consideration of the vision of the virgin wife, the pure mother and her antithesis, the fallen woman, is one way to glimpse at the depth of one aspect of the Victorian mind” (93-94). Although stereotypes such as these may be reinforced in literature, they may also be undermined through the subversion of stock characters which counter traditional expectations. In this study, I examine how Olive Schreiner’s portrayal of women characters counters nineteenth-century expectations and stereotypes, and becomes a means of negotiating the binary of ‚the angel‘ (the virgin wife, the pure mother) versus ‚the whore‘ (the fallen woman), thus creating a space for alternative feminine identities.

I suggest that Schreiner’s negotiations of feminine identity in her fiction may

have developed as a consequence of her hybrid identity as a British South African. Hence, an exploration of the context in which Schreiner was writing and the influences on her writing processes provides a strong foundation from which to explicate her subversion of feminine stereotypes. Schreiner's work was largely produced in a specifically colonial space, and many critics discuss the distinction between those who view her as a pioneer of South African literature and those who situate her within a British tradition. She in fact participates in both traditions, and Cherry Clayton argues that increasingly there is a reassessment of Schreiner's work in which her feminist thought is analysed alongside her critique of colonialism and imperialism. She suggests that this "recent linkage of the colonial and female predicaments affords insights into Schreiner's life and writings" (*Olive Schreiner* [1997] xii). Carolyn Burdett, in particular, explores this aspect of the importance of Schreiner's work in relation to both feminist and post-colonial theory, and draws attention to the significance of Schreiner having situated her novels specifically within a South African context. Schreiner's depiction of women is intimately linked to her understandings of the oppressive nature of the socio-political systems, informed by colonial and patriarchal discourse, within which she forged her own identity. As Elaine Showalter points out, as a "South African and as a woman, Schreiner was writing out of a double colonialism. The uncelebrated landscapes that she was trying to record were both the barren Karoo and the claustrophobic, inner landscape of the new woman" (*A Literature of Their Own* 204). Consequently, it may be Schreiner's position in a colonial context that enabled her to articulate an alternative literary space for women.

Although various critics, such as Clayton, Burdett and Liz Stanley, have adopted a feminist approach in their analysis of Schreiner's work, this study

constitutes a fresh approach in relation to her characterisation of women figures. Moreover, though extensive attention has been paid to *The Story of an African Farm* (1890), considerably less has been written about *Undine* (1929) – Schreiner’s first completed novel – and the unfinished *From Man to Man* (1926), which she worked on throughout her life. I have therefore focused particular attention on these lesser-known works. I propose that, in Schreiner’s literary project, the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ is re-imagined not only as ‘unfallen’, but also as a woman making alternative lifestyle choices within the possibilities offered by the notion of the New Woman. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis describe the New Woman as signalling “new, or newly perceived, forms of femininity which were brought to public attention in the last two decades of the nineteenth century” (1), forms of femininity less bound by the constrictions of patriarchal societal conventions. Schreiner’s conception of this New Woman develops from the juvenile, and at times clumsy, characterisation of the eponymous Undine in her first completed novel, *Undine*, to the more polished Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*, and finally to the refined Rebekah in *From Man to Man*. Although Lyndall has taken hold of many readers’ imaginations as a harbinger of new possibilities for womanhood, I argue that it is in fact Rebekah who offers a more fully realised and nuanced conception of the New Woman in Schreiner’s works. In *The Story of an African Farm*, the imaginative figuration of the potentialities of the New Woman is deferred: the only ending that Schreiner can conceive for her heroine is death. But, in *From Man to Man*, Schreiner expands fictionally on the issues she discusses in her polemical feminist tract, *Woman and Labour* (1911), aligning prostitution and marriage, and dismantling the binaric opposition of the ‘pure’ and the ‘fallen’ woman to a significant degree. Moreover, in this novel she portrays a New Woman who is to some extent economically and politically independent: Rebekah

uses money bequeathed to her by her father to buy a plot of land on which she grows food to support herself and her family. Thus, although Rebekah's ‚freedom‘ is still largely confined to the domestic space, her characterisation embodies a bold and fundamental bid for economic and political independence for women.

In addition to investigating Schreiner's fictional re-visioning of the notion of the ‚fallen woman‘ I explore a closely related issue: her characterisation of the ‚mother-figure‘. As is typical of many woman writers, Schreiner's conflictual relationship with her mother influenced her writing. According to Showalter, many women writers experience “either loss of, or alienation from, the mother” (*A Literature of Their Own* 61), and it is in the context of this assertion, and the framework of women's struggle to write that it presupposes, that I analyse Schreiner's writing process and her work. I argue that her own relationship with her mother, and the “hidden silences”(8) – to use Tillie Olsen's term – which it produced, paradoxically culminated in what Showalter has contended is her “important contribution to the female tradition”, particularly her articulation of the “tense, indirect perceptions of a new womanhood” (198). Thus Schreiner's valorisation of motherhood in *Woman and Labour* does not necessarily extend to her fiction, as is demonstrated by the grotesque Tant' Sannie in *The Story of an African Farm*, and the absent and ineffectual mothers in *From Man to Man* and *Undine*. Indeed, it is in her depiction of mother-figures that Schreiner challenges stock Victorian notions of motherhood and, in the process, creates an alternative view that is influenced by her feminist perspective and her negotiations of feminine identity.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Elizabeth Rooney argues that, by definition, feminist literary theory “resists generalization”, and that the “effort to propose a definition, genealogy or history of [such theory] ... threatens to simplify what is ... complex” (1). Ruth Robbins begins her book, *Literary Feminisms*, with a similar warning about the difficulty of definitions: “The definitions I want to produce and reproduce here should all ... be thought of as provisional, contingent, not that firm in fact, because I don’t want to harm or limit anyone with my definitions” (3). Mindful of the caution of these critics, I have tentatively employed Showalter’s theories about feminist literary criticism as a point of departure in structuring this study. The latter defines feminist literary theory through the division of the field into two main areas: the first, which she terms *feminist critique*, is concerned with “woman as reader”; the second, which she labels *gynocritics*, is concerned with “woman as writer” (“Towards” 25). Feminist critique is “a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history” (“Towards” 25). Gynocritics, on the other hand, analyses women as the creator of texts, and “begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture” (“Towards” 28). This division of feminist literary theory into two such broad groupings does, of course, oversimplify what is an immensely complex and varied field, a field in which there are often contrasting and even conflicting viewpoints. However, Showalter’s distinction is a starting-point from which Schreiner’s writing

processes and her works may be interrogated.

1.2.1 A Gynocritical Approach to Schreiner as a Writer

In the first half of this study, I employ a gynocritical approach to analyse the context in which Schreiner was writing, and the influences upon her style and productivity as a writer. Showalter expands on her definition by claiming that this theory is concerned with

woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and, of course, studies of particular writers and works. (“Towards” 25)

One of the earliest critics to write about ‘women’s writing’ was George Eliot, in her essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists”, which first appeared in the *Westminster Review* in October, 1856. Eliot suggests that texts written by women share certain characteristics of style and content that differentiate them from male-authored texts. Mary Jacobus analyses Eliot’s argument and concludes that the terms she uses are significant, since they highlight “a hidden problem as well as articulate[e] an obvious one” – that is in particular, the “nature of women’s access to culture and their entry into literary discourse” (10). She elaborates:

this access to a male-dominated culture may equally be felt to bring with it alienation, repression, division – a silencing of the ‘feminine’, a loss of women’s inheritance. The problem, then, is not George Eliot’s alone; it is that of women’s writing (and of feminist literary criticism) itself. (10)

Jacobus then discusses Virginia Woolf’s response to Eliot’s essay, proposing that the

terms Woolf uses “uncover something of the rift experienced by women writers in a patriarchal society, where language itself may re-inscribe the structures by which they are oppressed” (10). She questions whether women writers can “adapt traditionally male-dominated modes of writing and analysis to the articulation of female oppression and desire” (14), and instead, she posits the idea that “we rather reject tools that may simply re-inscribe our marginality and deny the specificity of our experience, [by] forging others of our own” (14).

If women write after their own kind, or possess ‘a literature of their own’, then traditional notions about literature are called into question. Ruth Robbins maintains that “reading women’s writing potentially gives reader and writer a more equal stake in interpretation in relation to the issue of gender. Most radically of all, it permit[s] women readers to claim literary qualities for texts by women that might otherwise have been dismissed” (74). For Robbins, one of the key figures who discusses a specifically female literary tradition is Patricia Mayer Spacks, in her book *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women’s Writing* (1972). Firstly, Spacks argues that there are aspects of women’s writing that transcended historical, geographical and class structures and, secondly, she is concerned with how problems of the woman *writer* affect the woman *reader*. Four years after Spack’s *The Female Imagination* appeared, Ellen Moers published *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1976), in which she examines women writer’s biographies, and focuses on such writers’ historical and social contexts, literary influences, and the impact of financial considerations on their writing. Significantly, Moers is concerned not only with the woman as writer, but also with the effects of reading on the female reader. In particular, she analyses the “female Gothic”, and emphasises that the Gothic “get[s] to the body itself, its glands, muscles, epidermis, and circulatory system” (qtd in

Robbins 82). This emphasis on the body is significant since, as Robbins notes, “In an age when female education was often inadequate, the high emotions of pity and fear produced by tragedy, were not available to women writers ... But their bodies, their physical sensations, were available” (82). Robbins concludes that “Moers reads the female Victorian gothic tradition ... as arising either from the feminine situation of domesticity and pregnancy, or from the feminine experience of sexual repression in which their bodies experienced desire in a social context where female desire was understood as monstrous” (82).

Moer’s text was succeeded the following year by Showalter’s seminal gynocritical work, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), in which the latter employs a historicist approach which elaborates on specific phases in women’s writing. She suggests that one of the problems with feminist literary criticism is that, because women writers have been studied in isolation, the links between writers and the development of a female tradition have not been noted. To counter this oversight, she proposes a comparative study of women writers to enable a recognition of patterns and phases in a female tradition. In order to frame her analytical approach, she divides women writers into three phases:

“Feminine, Feminist and Female”. Later, in “Towards a Feminist Poetics”, Showalter elaborates on the approach she employed in *A Literature of their Own*. She states that the Feminine phase, dating from 1840 to 1880, is characterised by women writing “in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture” – that is, by writing in which women writers have “internalised [patriarchal culture’s] assumptions about female nature” (35). The content of this period, then, is “typically oblique, displaced, ironic and subversive; one has to read ... between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text” (35). The next stage, the Feminist phase, dates from about

1880 to 1920, and is characterised by the use of literature to “dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood” (35). Finally, in what Showalter identifies as the Female phase, “women reject both imitation and protest – two forms of dependency – and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art” (36).

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer in the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, published in 1979, investigates how women writers of the time were trapped in a double bind. Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate that art was dependent on patriarchal authority: it was conventionally produced by men for consumption by men. Women who wrote were thus viewed as transcending the private, domestic sphere to which they had been relegated and impinging on a traditionally masculine, public domain. As Robbins points out, then, the “standards of literary value against which the woman writer had to compete were male-identified as well as male-defined, the works she produced were in turn defined as ‘less than’ art. The woman writer suffered therefore a double-pronged attack: as a woman and as an artist” (90).

Obviously, there are limits and problems to the gynocritical mode of criticism that has briefly been outlined. For example, it presumes that all women writers can be situated in a single female tradition. In some ways it therefore repeats the faults of the system that it challenges, in its assumption that women from, for example, different classes, ethnic groups, cultural divisions, backgrounds and sexual orientations, subscribe to a single, common tradition. One way of responding to this problem, however, is to recognise that, instead of one female tradition, there are in fact multiple female traditions. Robbins highlights this notion through her use of the term *feminisms*. She proposes that the “plural form feminisms is political because it disrupts the notion that ‘feminism’ is a single category, with clear limits, fixed in a

single semantic space. The plural form rewrites the category as something potentially transgressive or subversive” (3).

Nevertheless, employing a gynocritical approach to examine the social, historical and personal influences on Schreiner’s work, reveals that it is her peripheral position as a colonial and woman writer that enabled her rewritings of feminine identity. Writing in a contested space, her vision of an alternative femininity was a product of the society in which she forged her own identity. Her hybrid identity as a British South African provided a unique perspective that allowed for a reviewing of femininity and masculinity as defined by both Victorian and colonial South African society and, in this respect, she was something of a trailblazer – as is attested by the prominence her work continues to enjoy. In her attempts to resist the conventional Victorian conception of femininity, through erasing the binary between ‚angel’ and ‚whore’, she envisaged and produced literary representations of what came to be known as the New Woman.

1.2.2 Schreiner and Feminine Stereotypes

In the second half of this study, I examine how Schreiner undermines the reproduction of feminine stereotypes in literature, and apply Showalter’s category of “feminist critique”. Showalter, however, discusses her reservations about the value of examining stereotypes in literature and literary culture: “If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be” (“Towards” 27). Nevertheless, exploring how a woman writer subverts stereotypes in a way that counters traditional expectations can

prove to be illuminating and productive in relation to how alternative spaces for feminine identity have been imaginatively projected in literature, perhaps even before their actualisation in reality.

Robbins, for example, asserts the value of a feminist criticism which focuses on representations of women, and suggests that, given “that the word ‘theory’ derives from a root that has to do with looking and spectacle, it should perhaps come as no surprise that modern feminist literary criticism began as a critique of images” (50). She also maintains that such criticism “began especially as a critique of the stereotypical images of femininity that literary texts present” (50-51), and that, “if the images presented in literary and artistic texts are powerful because of the power accorded to literature, images of women are an obvious starting point to begin a critique of the place of women in society at large” (51). Thus, it is important to examine stereotypes in literature because of the cultural and social power that negative constructions possess, and because literary representations not only reflect, but also reinforce social conventions, and contribute to the marginalisation and oppression of women in reality. Moreover, an elucidation of Schreiner’s subversion of feminine stereotypes suggests that, in her attempts to articulate an alternative space for women in her fiction and her political writings, she spoke for a generation of women who were marginalised and silenced. To illustrate, Schreiner’s close friend, Mary Brown, relates the story of a Lancashire woman who was deeply affected by *The Story of an African Farm* and explained how, for her, Lyndall expressed what could not always be articulated by women at the time: “I think there is hundreds of women what feels like that, but can’t speak it, but *she* could speak what we feel” (qtd in Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 46).

Robbins contends that stereotypes in literature may have an impact on how

people are perceived, since there is a relationship between *images* and *realities*, and this relationship is a “significant feature of feminist criticism” (52). She selects Virginia Woolf’s rejection of Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House” and Mary Wollstonecraft’s criticism of Rousseau’s image of idealised womanhood to indicate the damaging impact that such stereotypes have on women’s view of themselves (51-52). She maintains, however, that a critique of images of women also occurs *in fiction*. For example, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, Lucy Snowe visits an art gallery, where she “muses on the meanings of the representations of femininity that she sees there” (Robbins 54). While examining a painting of Cleopatra, she is observed by M. Paul, who is shocked that she is gazing at the indecent picture. He instead shows her a set of artworks entitled *La Vie d’une Femme*, in which four images demonstrate a woman figure in different stages of her life, namely *Jeune Fille* (young girl), *Mariée* (bride), *Jeune Marie* (young mother), and *Veuve* (widow).

Robbins comments that:

These images all depend on the woman’s supposed relationship with the male. The absent male figure to whose love the young girl aspires, who marries the young wife, fathers the young mother’s baby and dies leaving the widow, suggests the extent to which femininity is supposed to exist only in terms of its dependent relationship with the male. (55)

Significantly, then, these images depict a femininity framed in relation to a patriarchal conception of the role of women.

According to Robbins, feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Ellmann and Kate Millet “all share a commitment to pursuing the image as a way of analysing the ideological force of literature, and as a method for pursuing political analyses in the world beyond the text” (57). For example, de Beauvoir makes similar points to Wollstonecraft, in the sense that she argues that the perception of women as

inferior to men is a discursive construction. As Robbins notes, however, the idea that women are inferior to men is not „natural”; it is a “mode of thought in which Man is taken as the norm and the ideal, and Woman is his defining „other”” (57). She maintains that, in *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir presents the idea that “the image of woman comes from outside her. Woman is a myth, an object of male fantasy” (59). Similarly, in Ellmann’s *Thinking About Women* (1968), images and stereotypes of women are used to reflect on societal constructs, and in her analysis of literary texts, Ellman focuses particularly on “women as *words* – as the words they pull out of people’s mouths” (qtd in Robbins 61). Millet’s book, *Sexual Politics* (1969), examines the “sex scenes of a number of male-authored texts; ... it is an angry book, which is infuriated by the misogynistic images of women it finds in these scenes” (Robbins 63). All three of the texts that Robbins discusses, then, present a critique of how images and stereotypes have been used to marginalise and oppress women.

In this study, by contrast, I examine how Schreiner *subverts* stereotypes in order to offer an alternative to the Victorian notions of the ‚fallen woman’ and the ‚mother’. I frame my discussion within the more general, age-old opposition of the Madonna and the Whore in Western society, a dichotomy between ‚pure’ and ‚fallen’ which has its foundations in religious ideology. Millet, for example, describes the story of the Fall as “the central myth of the Judeo-Christian imagination and therefore of our immediate cultural heritage”, and claims that “this mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes” (qtd in Akca and Gunes 1). According to Catherine Akca and Ali Gunes, because of woman’s culpability for the fall of humanity, her sexuality and her reproductive function were placed under male control through the institution of

marriage and the ‚cult of motherhood‘, both of which confine women to the home. For Akca and Gunes, then, “the Biblical story of the Creation and the Fall becomes the basis of patriarchy” (1). They further suggest that, “if much of the patriarchal literary output of the Middle Ages continued to propagate the traditional myth of woman as some kind of monster of depravity, the obverse of this image, the icon of female purity, was also commonplace” (4). Significantly, religious imagery reinforces this dichotomy:

The type of female purity originates in the Biblical figure of the virgin mother Mary, who may be contrasted with the fallen mother Eve. The image of woman as madonna or angel is no more real than the image of woman as whore or witch, yet once again the Biblical origin of the stereotype validates it and imbues it with the aura of being received truth, which helps to account for its literary longevity. (Akca and Gunes 4)

Akca and Gunes point out that, “since the destiny of the virtuous woman is marriage, the stage has now been set for the angel to be imprisoned in domesticity as ‚the angel in the house‘” (9). If the reproductive and sexual functions of women are controlled by men through the institution of marriage, chastity and fidelity thus become moral and legal issues – important means through which men can guarantee the legitimacy of their heirs – and a validation of chastity and fidelity is inextricably linked to women being limited to the private sphere of the house. Moreover, according to Akca and Gunes,

Through her weakness, woman is believed to have brought about the fall of humanity, represented by Adam. Woman is, therefore, both vulnerable to temptation and a temptress herself, a threat to the moral welfare of mankind. Through her desire to taste of the forbidden fruit of the tree of life and knowledge, proffered by the serpent with its phallic connotations, woman caused innocence to be forfeited. Woman is thereby seen to disregard authority, to be capable of seeking to usurp divine (male) power, and to be carnal in her nature. In consequence, woman, her sexuality, and her reproductive function must be controlled by man. (1-2)

In other words, Eve was a temptation for Adam both sexually and in terms of the knowledge she could offer. The transferral of knowledge is therefore eroticised, resulting in the need for men not only to exercise sexual control over women, by confining them, but also intellectual control, by preventing them from gaining access to knowledge. In the light of these arguments, I explore Schreiner's characterisation of women who transgress both sexually and intellectually, and situate her female protagonists within the context of the New Woman and the potential resistance to such control(s) that she represents.

Just as Schreiner undermined constructions of the „fallen woman' in her fiction, she offered an alternative to traditional notions of motherhood. In *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Marianne Hirsch outlines various theories that have arisen in relation to narrative and plot, and then suggests that an “interesting and symptomatic slippage” emerges from her brief overview: “the exploration of origin and narrative, of its source and initial motivation, has moved almost immediately to a consideration of paternity” (51). She questions where the woman, particularly the mother, is to be located in conventional approaches to narrative ordering, and posits the idea that “the excess which must be contained, or the otherness that structures the fiction, is related more specifically to the figure of the mother” (52). She further suggests that women writers participate “in the process of placing the maternal into the position of silenced other” (52), and that, especially in nineteenth-century women's novels, “it is the mother's absence which creates the space in which the heroine's plot and her activity of plotting can evolve” (57). Thus, the “heroine, who wants to write, or who wants in any way to be productive and creative ... must break from her mother, so as not to be identified with maternal silence” (45). Similarly, in Schreiner's narratives, the distinct absence of positive

mother-figures provides her female heroines with the freedom to „write their own plots’. It is imperative, therefore, to explore the characterisation of mothers and daughters in Schreiner’s fiction, and to position her mother-figures within a feminist critical framework that analyses mother-daughter relations and “the mother” as an aesthetic image.

1.3 Chapter Outline

In the first two chapters of this study, I situate Schreiner in the context of her time, and discuss the societal and familial constraints that complicated her writing processes. In the first chapter, after briefly outlining Schreiner’s biographical background, I focus on the division between those critics who view her as a British author, situated within a British tradition of writing and writers, and those who view her as a South African author and a pioneer of South African and post-colonial literature. I then explore the reception of and critical responses to her work, as predicated on her depiction by her husband, Samuel C. Cronwright (hereafter referred to as Cronwright), in his biography, *The Life of Olive Schreiner* (1924), and his edition of her letters, *The Letters of Olive Schreiner* (1924). Although Cronwright depicts Schreiner as struggling to produce further work after the publishing of *The Story of an African Farm*, his image of her as a writer with an “inability to write” can be countered by examining the writings, both published and unpublished, that she *did* produce. In the second chapter, I examine Schreiner’s ostensible inability to write in greater detail, by employing Olsen’s theories about silences in literature. Following this, I explore Schreiner’s negotiation of her role as woman and writer, before discussing how her relationship with her mother and with various surrogate mother-

figures impacted on her creative practice. I suggest, here, that Schreiner's vision of an alternative feminine identity in her writings developed out of her understandings of her own experiences as a woman writer, as well as the influence of a number of female role models.

In the third and fourth chapters, I analyse the alternatives to female stereotypes that Schreiner creates in her fiction, particularly those stereotypes prevalent in the Victorian era. In "The Fallen Woman", I examine her characterisation of apparently 'fallen' female characters, and posit the idea that her fallen women are in fact unfallen – women who are prototypes for the alternative feminine identity of the New Woman. I then examine her presentation of male characters, focusing on men who are implicated in the woman's fall, before explicating her visioning of the 'new man'. In the following chapter, entitled "The Mother", I examine four maternal types that feature prominently in Schreiner's fiction, namely the absent mother, the grotesque mother, the childless mother, and the good mother. In addition, I briefly interrogate how father-figures are depicted.

In my final chapter, I draw some tentative conclusion on how Schreiner employs her writing to effect social change. I suggest that, despite Schreiner's ambiguous identity, a central characteristic that she possesses is that of storyteller, and that she applies her fictions to the task of articulating an alternative femininity and masculinity, and to challenge the heteronormative system in her fiction.

2 The Life and Times of a Colonial Writer

2.1 Biographical Background

Cronwright begins his biography of Schreiner's life by stating, "if Olive Schreiner could have chosen, she would have preferred that no biography of herself should be written" (vii). Joyce Avrech Berkman echoes this sentiment, and relates Schreiner's response to a request from an aspirant biographer: "I won't give him any details. I don't want my life written by anyone" (qtd in Berkman 3). Berkman further comments that Schreiner "never deviated from this position, modifying it only to the extent that she did not object to people writing about her books. They, not her life, she gave to the world" (3). This desire to keep her personal life private is also evident in Schreiner's resistance to being interviewed. According to Cronwright, "Olive was always opposed to interviewing, especially on personal matters" (*Life* 295). He refers to a letter she wrote in response to a request for an interview, in which she commented, "I have made it a fixed rule of my life never to countenance interviewing in any way or in any of its forms" (*Life* 295). I intend to discuss Schreiner's life here only insofar as to cover significant experiences which shed light on or may have influenced her work, particularly since it is indisputable that she drew on personal experience as a source for her fiction.

Born on 24 March 1855 at the Wittebergen Mission station in Basutoland (now Lesotho), Schreiner was the ninth of twelve children, five of whom died either in infancy or whilst still very young. The death of her sister Ellie in 1865 (Schreiner was ten at the time) cemented her doubts about religion: according to Stanley,

“throughout her life, Schreiner emphasised this as a major turning point or epiphany in her thinking about religion, life and death” (*Imperialism* 19).

Schreiner began telling stories at a young age: Cronwright notes that “As far back as any record goes, this little solitary, intense child, is found walking up and down talking and muttering to herself audibly in an imaginative world all her own” (*Life* 65). In 1870, she moved to Avoca, a small farm in Barkly East, where she lived with old family friends, the Orpens. J.M. Orpen recalls his recollections of Schreiner as a child, walking “up and down on top of a wall reciting poetry” (*Life* 78). In a letter to Cronwright which she wrote as an adult, one of the Orpen children, Lady Crewe, relates how she and her siblings “were all fascinated by [Schreiner’s] beauty and her gift for improvising the most thrilling stories” (*Life* 78). She further recalls, “I remember mamma asking her not go on with one very exciting story as we were very excitable little people ourselves, and after that the fount dried up, to our undying regret” (*Life* 78).

In later life, Schreiner was to use individuals she had encountered during her youth as a source for her fictional characters. For example, in a letter to Havelock Ellis, she tells the story of how she met Willie Bertram, the prototype for Waldo’s stranger (155) in *The Story of an African Farm*. In 1871, Schreiner was staying with her aunt, Elizabeth Rolland, at Hermon, a mission station in Basutoland. During a stormy night, there was a knock at the door that Schreiner’s aunt and cousin were too afraid to answer. Schreiner herself opened the door, however, and was later to recall: “There was a stranger like Waldo’s Stranger exactly” (*Life* 81). She comments that:

There was no house within fifty miles, so he slept there; the next morning he talked with me for a little while ... He lent me Spencer’s *First Principles*. I always think that when Christianity burst on the dark Roman world it was what that book was to me.
(*Life* 82)

Another example of Schreiner's fictional characters finding their inspiration in her personal experience is the relationship she had with Julius Gau. In 1872 Schreiner looked after Miss Gau, who was suffering from typhoid. Although Cronwright, significantly, does not refer to this, Schreiner was briefly engaged to Miss Gau's brother, Julius. The affair ended badly, and Schreiner left by ox-wagon to join her parents in Hertzog, during which journey she suffered the first of the asthma attacks which would plague her throughout her life. Not much is known about Schreiner's feelings for Julius Gau. Even at the time, her family were largely unaware of the situation, as is demonstrated in a letter written by her mother, Rebecca Schreiner to Kate Findlay, Schreiner's oldest sister, on 28 November 1872:

You must not be vexed with me dear Katie that I do not throw more light on Olive's affair. I can't – we are in the dark too. It has been a very heavy trial to us and coming so suddenly when all seemed so bright and hopeful makes it worse.

(“The Findlay Family Papers”)

However, it is indisputable that this failed relationship greatly influenced Schreiner, and was to give rise to recurring motifs in her fiction. Clayton, for instance, maintains that the “Gau affair led to a real or suspected pregnancy, a quick engagement, and a long, arduous coach journey to her parents” (*Olive Schreiner* [1997] 11), and further suggests that the latter was the “prototype for many such ill-fated coach journeys” (11) in Schreiner's novels, such as Lyndall's journey in *The Story of an African Farm*. Gau may also have been the source for her characterisation of men such as the “Piece of divine perfection” (78), Albert Blair, in *Undine*, and Lyndall's lover in *The Story of an African Farm*.

In 1873, Schreiner met John and Mary Brown, a couple who supported her desire to be a writer as well as her medical aspirations. Together the three devised

what they referred to as “The English Plan”, a strategy to enable Schreiner to go to England. After a period of having been passed between relatives and family friends, Schreiner began an independent life working as a governess, in order to fund this trip. Her years as a governess, from 1874 to 1881, proved fruitful for her writing, and it is during this period that drafts of *Undine*, *The Story of an African Farm*, and much of *From Man to Man* were written. She eventually left for England in 1881, and began training as a nurse in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, however, her health again became problematic. Years later, in a letter to Havelock Ellis, she writes of the illness she suffered while attending lectures at the Woman’s Medical School, and states: “I am very strong and well now, but have made up my mind that scribbling will be my only work in life” (*Life* 151). As the first indication of the seriousness of this commitment, *The Story of an African Farm* was published by Chapman, in 1883, under the pseudonym Ralph Iron (it was only to be reissued under Schreiner’s real name in 1887). In July of the same year, a second edition was released, with a new dedication to Mary Brown and a preface which outlined Schreiner’s ideas on art and literature.

Despite her aborted medical career, Schreiner’s time in England was intellectually stimulating – firstly, in relation to the writing she was producing and, secondly, in relation to the people that she met. In respect of the former, she worked continuously on novels and short stories, and many of the latter were published in various magazines, but particularly in *Woman’s World*, then edited by Oscar Wilde. Stanley notes the different literary preoccupation of Wilde and Schreiner, a difference highlighted by Wilde’s comment to W.B. Yeats:

Olive Schreiner ... is staying in the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks upon their faces, but I have told her that I live in the West End because nothing in life interests me but the mask. (qtd in *Imperialism* 4)

Significantly, many of the meaningful interactions Schreiner developed with people involved the exchange of books and ideas, and it must suffice here to mention only a few of the more important of these relationships. In 1884, Schreiner met Havelock Ellis (the prominent sex-reformer and writer of studies of sexual psychology), and they were subsequently to maintain a lifelong friendship, predominantly through letters. She wrote in her diary, in June 1884, “Ellis came to see me. I did not like him very much at first, but now I do, more and more. He has lent me Walt Whitman” (*Life* 167). Schreiner’s relationship with Ellis was complicated, however: the failure of a potential romantic relationship and significant differences of opinion – for example, with regard to issues such as Ellis’s militarism and Schreiner’s pacifism – led to a cooling off of their friendship in later years. In the mid 1880s, Schreiner also met Edward Carpenter, a socialist and homosexual rights campaigner. According to Cronwright, she admired Carpenter’s political tract, *Towards Democracy* (*Life* 171) and, in *My Days and Dreams*, the latter was to recall his first encounter with her, describing her as possessing “a wonderful beauty and vivacity, a lightning-quick mind” (*Life* 171). Stanley, however, notes a disagreement Carpenter and Schreiner had over the First World War: “an erstwhile pacifist, he had backtracked on his principles and found it irksome when Schreiner reminded him of his earlier moral and political teachings” (*Imperialism* 4). From 1885 to 1886, Schreiner became involved in the Men and Women’s Club (a London-based group, founded to discuss issues of morality and sexuality), where she met a number of intellectuals whom she later befriended. Stanley discusses the complex relationship between Karl Pearson and Schreiner, for example, which was threatened by her increasing intellectual and political distance from his ideas (*Imperialism* 29), and Burdett argues that *Woman and Labour* was written specifically to target what she terms “Pearsonian eugenics”

(*Progress of Feminism* 61). However, Schreiner began writing *Woman and Labour* at a time when she was in fact deeply involved with a number of intellectual communities in England, and she may have been influenced by any number of the ideas emanating from these circles and by several of their prominent figures, including Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter and Eleanor Marx. Stanley, for example, maintains that Schreiner's reading of socialist literature, and her encounters with radicals such as Karl Marx and his daughter led her to realise that "writing could itself be a political act, a form of social intervention capable of bringing about change" (*Imperialism* 24). Moreover, Eleanor Marx, whom Schreiner herself described as her "mental champagne", was a "political and intellectual equal, someone she could debate ideas with, who was independent-minded and politically challenging" (*Imperialism* 24).

Whilst in Britain, Schreiner became increasingly concerned with the position of prostitutes. According to Stanley, she saw prostitution as "fundamentally related to, indeed as a quintessentially defining form of, sex parasitism, and she argued that unless this was recognised it could not be responded to, morally or politically" (*Imperialism* 85). In October 1884 she wrote to Havelock Ellis, asking him to obtain books about prostitution for her, and enquired about the cost of the *Blue Book* on the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, since she wanted to purchase a copy if it was not too expensive (*Cronwright Letters* 42). She later did purchase the *Blue Book*, and subsequent letters demonstrate her anger and concern over the Act, which forced prostitutes to submit themselves to physical examinations, though their male clients were neither held accountable nor forced to undergo similar examinations. Moreover, Schreiner became aware that prostitutes were often harassed (sometimes sexually) by policemen. She herself had a negative encounter with a police officer as a result of the

persecutions that were enabled by the Contagious Diseases Act. In a letter to Ellis, she recounts how she was walking home with a friend of hers (Dr H.B. Donkin) late one night, when they were stopped by this officer who attempted to arrest her because he assumed she was a prostitute. In highlighting his self-righteousness, she exclaims, “If you had seen the look of the wretch as he came up and said: ‚I don’t want you, sir, I want *her*!’” (Cronwright *Letters* 89). Incidents such as this only further cemented her desire to assist prostitutes. In a letter to Karl Pearson, for example, she comments on the solidarity that she felt with them:

Sometimes when I have been walking in Gray’s Inn Road and seen one of those terrible old women that are so common there, the sense of agonised *oneness* with her that I have felt, that she was myself only under different circumstances, has stricken me almost mad. (Rive, *Letters* 65-66)

On the other hand, Schreiner’s involvement with prostitutes at times led her to withdraw from other social contact. In a letter to Ellis she reveals her distress:

Oh, when will the time come when we shall love each other and realise that humanity is one! Remind me to tell you about a beautiful girl I saw; but it’s not only the prostitute makes me sad, it’s everything. I am so glad to get back to my little white quiet bedroom, but want to help those women. (Cronwright, *Letters* 97)

Schreiner not only conversed with and assisted prostitutes, she also wrote about the societal problem that gave rise to their situation in her socio-political works, such as *Woman and Labour*, and in her fictional works, such as *From Man to Man*.

Schreiner returned to South Africa in 1889, a return that “represented a choice she was making about how to live, and also how to be, as a person” (Stanley, *Imperialism* 31). To illustrate, Schreiner maintains that her homecoming enabled her to turn “with such a keen kind of relish to the external world” (qtd in *Imperialism* 31). A few years later, she was to encounter her future husband. In his biography of

Schreiner's life, Cronwright states "My relationship with Olive begins with my reading *The Story of an African Farm*" (231). He was deeply moved by the novel and wrote a letter thanking her, a letter she subsequently kept in an envelope marked, "Cron's first letter to me". The two only met in person two and a half years after the letter was written – in 1892, when Schreiner was thirty-eight and Cronwright was twenty-nine. Schreiner again travelled to England in May 1893 for a brief time before they were married' and Cronwright explains:

She had decided to return to England before she met me ... In addition to her original intention, there was, I think, this also in her mind later, to get away for a longish period and see whether the attraction we had for each other would persist when we were separated. (*Life* 254)

While in England, Schreiner continued writing letters to Cronwright, and in one of these, she comments:

I would like to take your name instead of mine if I married you, only I am known by mine everywhere. Do you think it would be very strange if we were "Cronwright Schreiner"? It would be so beautiful if we could have one name. (*Life* 256)

She returned to South Africa in October 1893, and a few months later married Cronwright, on 24 February 1894, in a ceremony that was extremely unconventional for the time. According to Cronwright, they were married at the magistrate's house in Middelburg, "under ante-nuptial contract (without community of property), the ceremony being entirely civil and very short" (262). After the ceremony, "Olive drove to the hotel in a cape-cart; she insisted on driving back alone" (262) as a way of emphasising her independence.

After living for a time with Cronwright on his farm outside Cradock, Schreiner's health deteriorated, and this caused the couple to move to Kimberley to

find relief in a different climate. There they lived in “The Homestead”, a property on the outskirts of Kimberley which Schreiner bought herself (*Life* 273). Their only child was born on 30 April 1895, but merely lived a few hours. This loss deeply affected Schreiner: whenever she moved she had the baby carried with her, and it was later reinterred with her in her tomb on Buffelskop, near Cradock. While in Kimberley, Schreiner and Cronwright lived an isolated and private life, although the latter mentions occasional visitors, such as the author Rudyard Kipling, and F.C. Selous and Tengo-Jabavu, the editors of the newspaper *Imvo*. Selous and Tengo-Jabavu had attended the *Indaba*, “the Native Conference with Rhodes” (*Life* 273), and subsequently discussed their concerns with the Cronwright-Schreiners. It was conversations such as these that led Schreiner to become increasingly worried about the political situation in Southern Africa, which she wrote about in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*. She became increasingly outspoken against the atrocities that were being committed under British imperialism, as Burdett notes:

A growing anxiety about and antagonism towards British imperial policy and the new industrial capitalism epitomised by Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company resulted in a variety of fictional and non-fictional works which have, until recently, been largely ignored and difficult to access.

(“Schreiner Revisted” 222)

In December 1895, whilst the couple were on holiday in Port Alfred, the Jameson Raid occurred. Cronwright notes that he and Schreiner immediately associated Rhodes with the Raid, “and said so. I remember how indignant English people were that we should connect Rhodes with anything so dishonourable” (*Life* 277). The Cronwright-Schreiners travelled to England in January 1897, in order to publish *Trooper Peter Halket*, and happened to be on the same ship as Rhodes, who had been called to England in order to give evidence to the House of Commons Committee of

Enquiry into the Jameson Raid. Cronwright notes that, “On account of the Raid on the Transvaal and Rhodes’s subsequent public actions, both Olive and myself refused to speak to him on board ship, or have anything to do with him” (*Life* 288). Their views on Rhodes resulted in conflict not only with the general public, but also with Schreiner’s family, in particular. Cronwright states that, “Olive’s mother, Ettie and Theo became ardent defenders of Rhodes. Mrs Schreiner and Ettie wrote vehemently to Olive about her views and mine. One letter from Ettie brought on a grave attack of illness” (*Life* 277). In a letter to J.T. Lloyd on 14 December 1896, Schreiner states: “I am broadening my back already for the Chartered Company attacks”, but hastens to add: “I do not feel anything so much as the attacks from members of my own family” (Cronwright, *Letters* 223).

She and Cronwright returned to Kimberley in September 1897 for a brief time, before moving to Johannesburg in November 1898. Schreiner’s health problems resurfaced after a few months, and she then moved to a number of different locations before settling for an extended period in Hanover in September 1900. At this time, she was extremely outspoken against British involvement in South Africa and, during the South African War (1899-1902), she was especially critical of inhumane tactics such as the use of concentration camps and the scorched earth policy – the burning of farms belonging to Boers. Henry W. Nevins, a correspondent of *The Daily Chronicle* during the Siege of Ladysmith, recalls one of Schreiner’s fiery speeches in opposition to the Boer War, in his book *Changes and Chances* (1923). He comments,

Indeed, though she stood perfectly still, she was transfigured into flame. Indignation can make the dumb to speak and stones be eloquent. But this woman was not dumb, and was no stone. I have heard much indignant eloquence, but never such a molten torrent of white-hot rage. It was overwhelming. When it suddenly ceased, the large audience ... could hardly gasp. If Olive Schreiner ... had called them to storm the Government House, they would have

thrown themselves upon the bayonets. (115)

While in Hanover under house arrest imposed by the British government, Schreiner's house in Johannesburg was raided by British soldiers, and many papers were destroyed, among which were drafts of one of her novels.

During the South African War, Cronwright and Schreiner lived apart, although Cronwright returned to Hanover for brief periods. Stanley suggests that, by the time the war started, "there were strains in the Schreiners' marriage at a personal level" (*Imperialism* 36). She draws attention to marital difficulties that developed as a result of two "apparently unlinked but major differences between them" (*Imperialism* 36). The first was connected with Cronwright's suspected affair with Isaline Philpot, an acquaintance whom Schreiner had met while she was living in Britain, whilst the second was related to their differing views on the political situation in South Africa. With regard to the latter, Stanley suggests that their "growing political distance had in fact become a gulf, something revealed around the policy of the Cape Women's Enfranchisement League" (*Imperialism* 37). As evident in her earlier engagement with the unjust treatment of prostitutes in England, Schreiner's concerns with political issues were not confined to colonial and imperial domains; she was also deeply concerned with the position of women in society in general. In 1908, she became vice-president of the Women's Enfranchisement League in South Africa, but later resigned when it became apparent that only white women's right to vote was being championed. As Stanley explains, "starting in 1908 or 1909 with splits in some branches, the League abandoned universal suffrage and adopted a franchise policy which excluded non-white women" (*Imperialism* 37). She then discusses Cronwright's misrepresentation of Schreiner's resignation in his biography, in which

he “present[s] this as the product of her „wild’ and incomprehensible objection to the amalgamation of branches” (*Imperialism* 37), when in reality, her concerns were legitimate and her resignation an ethical and political decision.

In December 1913, Schreiner travelled to Europe in an attempt to gain medical assistance for her asthma and heart problems. After a brief stay in England, she arrived in Italy to receive the aforementioned medical aid, before travelling to Germany to visit her father’s birthplace. She then returned to England, where she remained for the duration of the First World War and a couple of years thereafter. Schreiner, a pacifist, was “opposed to every war” (*Life* 365), and wrote numerous private letters and a number of articles protesting against the war. She began writing a book about war, a portion of which was posthumously published as “The Dawn of Civilisation” in the *Nation and Athenæum* on 21 March 1921. It was Schreiner’s anti-war position, in relation to both the South African War and the First World War, that led many people, including her family, to view her as a traitor to England, in relation to both its local and global interests.

Schreiner returned to South Africa in August 1920, and died on 10 December 1920. She was found in bed, still wearing her glasses and holding the book she had been reading. The post-mortem that she had herself arranged confirmed that she had died of a „heart problem’ (*Life* 390); a condition from which her father and several of her siblings also died. She was reinterred by Cronwright at Buffelskop outside Cradock in 1921, together with her baby and dog, Nita. When Cronwright himself died, he too was buried in the sarcophagus, which was adorned with a brass plate engraved: “Olive Schreiner, Cronwright-Schreiner, Baby and „Nita””.

2.2 Schreiner's Hybrid Identity as a British South African

Schreiner's hybrid identity is highlighted by the years she spent in both England and South Africa, and it is important to discuss the distinction that exists between those who view her as a pioneer of South African literature, and those who situate her within a British tradition. Indeed, I intend to demonstrate that, in fact, she may be inserted in both traditions, and that it is her peripheral position as a British South African that enabled her to create fictional work that challenged the novelistic and societal expectations of the metropole. Thus, it is increasingly significant that critics have interpreted her writings as intimately related to her marginal position – firstly, as a woman and, secondly, as a woman living in a colonial society.

Schreiner's own perception of her national identity shifted over the course of her life. Initially she viewed herself as British, as is demonstrated in her references to England as "home" in her letters. Although her mother was British and her father was German, she was born in South Africa, but she initially identified more strongly with her British heritage. As previously mentioned, at the age of twenty-six, she moved to England and lived there from 1881 until 1889, when she returned to South Africa. From 1914 to 1920, she again lived in England, and travelled around Europe, returning to South Africa shortly before her death. Stanley, however, maintains that, from "her return to South Africa in late 1889 onwards, Schreiner saw herself as an „Afrikander": someone who was white but whose allegiances, whose sense of belonging and self, and whose political and ethical priorities, were very much of Africa" ("Shadows" 252).

Although Schreiner's national identification altered during the course of her life, British critics have primarily viewed her writing as situated within a metropolitan

feminist tradition – a view heavily indebted to Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Brontë to Lessing*. In the latter, Showalter emphasises Schreiner’s early influence on other British women writers, just as South African critics emphasise her influence on later South African writers. She draws attention to Schreiner’s narrative voice, which she describes as sometimes “insistent and nagging”, but still attuned to “the reality of female experience” (198). She further points out that, although “Other women whom she influenced – Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Doris Lessing – were to make much better use of [this voice] ... Schreiner hit upon it first. It is the fitful, fretful rhythm of women’s daily lives, a Beckett monolog without a beginning or an end” (198). Similarly, John Goode emphasises Schreiner’s seminal importance in a metropolitan tradition of women’s writing – in particular, in relation to her status as a feminist writer writing about the New Woman. Goode analyses the character Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, and compares Hardy’s novel briefly to what he describes as the best feminist text of the period, *The Story of an African Farm* (109). Significantly, Goode discusses the fragmentary nature of the latter, and suggests that it is this very fracturing of form that gives the novel its instrumentality (111). He also points to its polyphonic qualities: “it is a carefully constructed text, positing many voices against each other” (109). Adopting the stereotypical view of Schreiner that is the inheritance of Cronwright’s biography, however, Goode compares her to Sue Bridehead, and claims that, as a writer, Schreiner “gets treated rather like Sue as a character – the talented neurotic who was unable to keep up any significant level of productivity” (109).

Despite Schreiner’s insertion into a metropolitan feminist tradition, her voice is distinctively colonial and, Stephen Gray claims, only once we deal with her “South

Africanness” will we “be more confident about the artistry, the ‚greatness‘, the power and the effect of this literary termagant” (138). He highlights the problems of applying British modes of criticism to South African writing, and comments that “Southern African critics have become so accustomed to accepting the fixed patterns in critical works on the novel in Britain that they assume the same easy pattern-making can be operative in the field of Southern African fiction as well” (134-135). For Gray, it is important to examine Schreiner’s position as a South African writer because she is “the first author to think out a blow-by-blow answer to the question: what can Southern African literature be?” (141). He analyses a scene from *The Story of an African Farm* which demonstrates this claim, a scene in which Lyndall tries to read the books that once held so much meaning for her and tosses them aside one by one, and suggests that here Schreiner “is not advocating that all books be flung out of the window ... In her rejection of the books generally available to her, she was creating all the possibilities of a new type of literature” (141).

As a colonial writer, Schreiner participates both in a long-established British and in a nascent South African tradition. However, she is also, to a certain extent, alienated from the British literature that is her inheritance, and depicts this alienation in her writing. This is demonstrated in the scene in *From Man to Man* in which Rebekah’s frustration with the books she read as a child is recalled: “The Geology she liked much; but it had distressed her because, like the botany book, it was written for people in England, and the plants and rocks and fossils mentioned she could not find in Africa” (173). Significantly, the title of Schreiner’s most famous novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, immediately highlights the centrality of its African setting. Moreover, in the second edition of the novel, she uses the preface to respond to early criticism of this text, and to defend her decision not to simply adopt and adapt British

modes of imperial romance to depict the colonial context:

It has been suggested by a kind critic that he would better have liked the little book if it had been a history of wild adventure; of cattle driven into inaccessible „kranzes’ by Bushmen; „of encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes’. (*Story* 29-30)

She then explicitly states, “This could not be. Such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand: there the gifts of the imagination untrammelled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings” (30). In refusing to write the imperialist adventure narrative that metropolitan readers expect, she instead “paints what lies before [her]” (30). Simon Lewis, however, questions whether, “Given the ideological baggage of the English language, Victorian culture, and pastoral tradition [it is] possible to write an African landscape that *resists* imperialist ideology” (88). He nevertheless argues that, to a certain extent, Schreiner succeeds in her articulation of a landscape unbound by colonial ideology, and suggests that her personal investment in the landscape gives rise to representations that are imbued with moral purpose. To elaborate, Lewis suggests that, for Schreiner, “realism of representation was not just a question of style, of technical skill or accuracy of reproduction, but was fiercely tied to an ethics of „right seeing”” (91). Thus, in spite of Schreiner’s “connection to prevailing English landscape ideology ... in establishing the validity of a specifically African landscape for literary treatment in English she does pioneer a way for African writers – black or white – to follow” (100).

Burdett further explores the importance of Schreiner’s work in relation to both feminist and post-colonial theory, drawing attention to the significance of the fact that she situates her novels specifically within a South African context. She claims that Schreiner’s depictions of the natural and human worlds were framed by contemporary developments in scientific thought, which affected how Victorians viewed the place

of humanity in the world – particularly with regard to a re-evaluation of religious notions. For example, Burdett highlights Schreiner’s depictions of the natural environment, and suggests that this “capricious and cruel nature, counterpart to a lost and wandering humanity, is a product of the imaginative space opened for the Victorians by geology and biology, most famously in Darwin’s *Origin of Species*” (*Progress of Feminism* 23). She further points out that, in its “more negative form, evolutionary theory gave rise to anxieties about a world filled with chaos and excess, with waste and cruelty, in which extinction is the fate of those unfitted for the struggle for survival” (23). Schreiner, however, who read Darwin as a young girl, questions Darwinian ideas in her fiction. In the chapter “Raindrops in the Avenue”, in *From Man to Man*, her protagonist, Rebekah, muses on a number of philosophical and socio-political notions and, significantly, offers a qualification of the concept of natural selection. She exclaims, “The fittest survived! – the fittest for what?” (216), and comments, “yes, the struggle has gone on and the fittest have survived. The fittest? – to survive; not of necessity the fittest in any other sense in which we humans use the word” (215). In her „scribblings’, Rebekah advocates the protection of the weak by the strong, and presents the “mierkat” as an example, highlighting how these animals survive because they demonstrate responsibility for all the members of the group. She maintains:

It is this passionate love for one another, this endless self-sacrifice for all, this devotion to the weaker by the stronger, which makes it possible for these little delicate furry creatures with their beautiful eyes and small powers of defence to survive in our terrible barren enemy-filled plains. (211)

It is in the concept of what Rebekah terms “mother-love” (210) that Schreiner offers an alternative to the patriarchal colonial and imperial domination of the land and its

people, a domination which ostensibly finds its justification in Darwinian ideas. In this regard, Stanley draws attention to how “some Schreiner scholarship has insisted on Schreiner’s ‘social Darwinist’ and so racist views” but points out that “throughout her life she promoted universal suffrage and full citizenship rights for everyone” and “insistently rejected any notion of biological determinism” (*Imperialism* 38).

2.3 A Damaged Genius?

Schreiner’s hybrid colonial identity is not the only factor to be considered in an analysis of influences on and perceptions of her writing. A common trend in Schreiner scholarship has been a misrepresentation of her, both as a writer and as a person, as a ‘damaged genius’. Stanley, in particular, has conducted extensive and detailed research into Cronwright’s manipulation of perceptions of Schreiner and her work. As the author of the first biography, *The Life of Olive Schreiner*, the editor of the first publication of Schreiner’s letters, *The Letters of Olive Schreiner*, and of posthumous editions of her work, such as *From Man to Man* and *Undine*, Cronwright’s influence in shaping perceptions of Schreiner has been largely underestimated and are unchallenged. Stanley, however, seeks to highlight how his misrepresentation of her has affected subsequent Schreiner scholarship.

In her article, “Mimesis, Metaphor and Representation: Holding out an Olive Branch to the Emergent Schreiner Canon”, Stanley discusses a passport photograph which was taken of Schreiner just before she returned to South Africa from Britain in 1920. This photograph was found and altered by Cronwright, and a copy was sent to one of her friends, Betty Molteno, accompanied by a letter in which he wrote:

I knew how you’d value the photo of Olive ... I managed to

unearth ... taken on the 6th August (she sailed on the 13th). I then had it touched up ... it is Olive old, weary &, so to say, dying, with her back to the wall. One misses the violent force & radiant energy & vitality which characterised her in her glorious power & which she showed at times even to the last; but I am so glad to have it.

(qtd in "Mimesis" 32)

Stanley argues that, in „touching up’ this photograph, Cronwright elided the ‚real’ woman that Schreiner was at the time that it was taken, “old, weary &, so to say, dying, with her back to the wall”, and replaced this image with one approximating his view of her, in which she is characterised by “violent force & radiant energy & vitality”. She then suggests that what Cronwright accomplished with this alteration is symptomatic of his construction of the *idea* of Schreiner in general, an idea which is now assumed to be an accurate representation of her, but which is in reality, however, largely his creation. Stanley draws attention to how “descriptions about people are often made using metaphors”, metaphors which are used “to characterise the behaviour or cast of mind of a person” and which act as “tropes which frame, in the sense of *govern*, how we think about a person ... and so come to stand for their entire character” (“Mimesis” 29). She argues that the metaphors that Cronwright employed to describe Schreiner have become regarded as authoritative. Thus, his interventions have shaped the views of Schreiner scholars and readers alike, to the extent that the ideas that he propagated about her (for example, that she was a ‚damaged genius’ and had a problematic relationship with her mother) are assumed to be accurate, and the original source of these ideas is unquestioned. Stanley discusses this point further, and argues that a process of ‚inter-referencing’ has taken place:

Individual pieces of scholarly work on Olive Schreiner and/or her writing each provide particular arguments and advance particular claims. What has become a dominating strand within this ‚field of scholarly work’ is characterised by a circle of inter-referencing, treating key secondary sources as though containing primary data,

with the consequence that the often unsettled, unproven or even disproved character of some of the claims made about Schreiner is somehow ‚lost’ in their presentation as ‚certain facts (because A and B contain them)’. What results are ‚facts’ about Schreiner which are actually highly arguable claims but which are presented instead as both certain and definitive of the woman.

(“Mimesis” 37)

Stanley then suggests that, as critical readers of and respondents to Schreiner’s work, we should question the ‚facts’ in the emergent canon, in particular by using archival and published information to assess the validity of ‚received opinion’ and to ensure that the ‚facts’ originally propagated by Cronwright are not simply blindly accepted.

Much has been written about the authenticity of Cronwright’s representation of Schreiner’s life, but my purpose here is only to provide a brief synopsis of some of the points he makes in his biography, *The Life of Olive Schreiner*. Ironically, Cronwright begins the Preface by claiming that, if he had not undertaken to write the biography, “some unauthorized life would appear, necessarily incomplete and almost certainly incorrect” (vii), and that “she would be misunderstood and misrepresented, unless the only person who ever had an opportunity of knowing her thoroughly should make the attempt to delineate her personality” (viii). One of the more damaging notions that Cronwright himself instigated, however, was that Schreiner was a woman ill-equipped to deal, in a practical sense, with worldly demands. He claims, for instance, that “for all her genius and intellect Olive was in many ways peculiarly unfitted for the struggle of life. Not only did her intellect not function well in certain directions (especially in business); it actually unfitted her for almost all kinds of work” (100). Cronwright is dismissive, too, of Schreiner’s ability to interact with other people, stating that “she was generally a bad judge of people” (173) – although he contrasts this claim with the argument that “if she set herself, as an artist, to draw a

character „as God sees it’ ... she would get very close to the ideal standard” (174). In his descriptions of their domestic life, he (re)creates a scenario in which he did everything in order to allow Schreiner the opportunity to write, and yet she was unable to produce the promised work. He says, for example, that “on the farm Olive had nothing to do except give the house-servants orders. I had run the house for many years and, as far as possible, continued to do so, largely in order to leave her free to do her literary work” (265). When Schreiner’s problems with asthma resurfaced, resulting in the move from Cronwright’s farm near Cradock to an environment that would hopefully not aggravate her symptoms, Cronwright highlights his self-sacrifice:

in Olive I had a sacred trust and [felt] that it would be almost criminal if any act of mine should prevent her writing. I had to give her the chance, it seemed to me, at almost any cost to myself. I did not know her so well then as I did later, her impracticability, her inability really to work. (269)

Cronwright’s reverential descriptions of his unshakeable belief in Schreiner’s gift, his “conviction that she was a great genius, a great artist” (301), are invariably juxtaposed with numerous comments about her inability to write the promised novels. His influential comments in *The Life* and *The Letters* thus create the notion of Schreiner as persistently plagued by writer’s block. Woolf’s review of Cronwright’s edition of Schreiner’s letters, in *The New Republic* in March 1925, is a perfect example of how his depiction of Schreiner has influenced the perceptions of her readers. According to Woolf, Schreiner

won fame and popularity enough to gratify the most ambitious with her first book, *The Story of an African Farm*. She came to England, and was at once the centre of an appreciative group of distinguished men. Her husband, as he told us last year in his biography, sacrificed a livelihood that she might pursue her work under the most favourable conditions ... Nevertheless, all the strife and agony which ring through her letters ... resulted in one remarkable novel and a few other fragmentary works which no

admirer of *The Story of an African Farm* would care to place beside it. (qtd in Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 93-94)

The „facts’ about Schreiner that Woolf relies on, here, are manifestly disturbed by Cronwright’s interventions. Stanley, however, maintains that Cronwright’s *The Letters* “is now widely recognised as heavily bowdlerised as well as being highly partial in the selections of both letters and correspondents included” (*Imperialism* 55), although at the time of publishing this was not apparent to many readers. She highlights the problems with the edition, pointing out that, although *The Letters* is supposedly a collection of around nine hundred letters, in some cases only one sentence has been extracted from a letter and, in other instances, two or more letters have been combined to form one apparent whole. Stanley claims, then, that the collection “gives a skewed impression of Olive Schreiner as a letter-writer and also about who her key correspondents were” (*Imperialism* 55). Cronwright’s motives for emphasising some correspondents over others are, in her view, questionable. For example, “some thirty inconsequential letters to Isaline Philpot are included, presumably to obviate any gossip that her relationship with Cronwright-Schreiner might be suspect” (Stanley, *Imperialism* 56). Cronwright’s personal agenda, then, affected the selective view of Schreiner that he produced.

Though it is accurate to claim that Schreiner did not publish another novel as successful as *The Story of an African Farm* had been, her husband’s claim that she was unable to “complet[e] any literary work” (300, emphasis added) and that she struggled to write can be refuted by enumerating the published and unpublished writings that *do* exist in archival resources. As Stanley argues, many of the blind spots in the Schreiner critical canon can be “traced back to Cronwright-Schreiner’s hand in producing *The Life* and *The Letters* and destroying as much primary evidence as he

could” (“Mimesis” 39).

2.4 The Controversy over Schreiner’s Productivity

The debate about Schreiner’s lack of productivity and so-called inability to write is largely characterised by speculation and conjecture, and the issue that obviously needs to be addressed here, as suggested above, is what exactly she *did* produce. As Stanley points out, for example, “Schreiner has often been presented as a failed writer, perhaps because of taking her own comments about what she failed to write at face value. Looking chronologically at her work puts the emphasis firmly on what she did write and did complete, and thus better enables its assessment as a body of work, as an oeuvre” (*Imperialism* 52-53). In *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, Stanley devotes a chapter to discussing Schreiner’s actual output which I draw on in what follows. Stanley firstly begins with Schreiner’s letters, “because of their central importance for understanding her ideas, relationships and the shifts and changes of her life” (52). She then discusses her fictional work, and finally considers her non-fictional work – more specifically her writings on political issues in South Africa and on the position of women in society.

Schreiner wrote letters for most of her life: her first letter has been dated to 1871, and her last letter was written on the day she died in 1920. Although Cronwright destroyed many of these letters, five thousand still exist in archival sources. They are therefore “an important and still considerably under-utilised ‚work’ in their own right” (Stanley, *Imperialism* 52). There are three published collections of Schreiner’s letters, namely: *The Letters of Olive Schreiner* (1924), edited by Cronwright; *The Letters of Olive Schreiner Volume 1 1871-1899* (1987), edited by

Richard Rive; and *My Other Self: The Letters of Havelock Ellis, 1884-1920* (1992), edited by Yaffa Claire Draznin. In addition to these compilations, letters in archives and personal collections are scattered across the world. There are, however, major collections in three specific countries. The South African collections are situated at the Cory Library, Rhodes University in Grahamstown; the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown; the South African Library and the University of Cape Town in Cape Town; and the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. In England, Schreiner's letters can be found at the University of London; The Library, London; and the City of Sheffield Public Library, Sheffield. Finally, in the United States of America, her letters are located at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center, University of Texas in Austin (Stanley, *Imperialism* 165-166).

Schreiner wrote fictional work, including novels, short stories and allegories, throughout her life. She began by telling stories to herself as a young child (*Life* 67) and ended with *From Man to Man*, which she continued revising until her death. The question of how many novels Schreiner actually wrote is not as simple as it first appears, however. As Stanley points out, the obvious answer is three, namely: *The Story of an African Farm*, *From Man to Man*, and *Undine*, though she problematises this figure by posing a number of significant questions:

Precisely what is meant by ‚a novel’ and should Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, published in 1897 and now usually referred to as an ‚allegorical novel’, be counted or not? What is the status of *Undine*, which Schreiner had completed but abandoned as ‚never to be published’? And how should “New Rush” be seen, for although a full manuscript for this title no longer exists, the archival evidence suggests that this novel was completed by Schreiner and read in draft by Philip Kent and Havelock Ellis in mid-1884. (*Imperialism* 58)

It can tentatively be argued, then, that Schreiner in fact wrote five novels: the three enumerated above, together with *New Rush* and *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, if the latter is counted as a politically allegorical novella. Allegory was an important technique in Schreiner's work, and her allegories and allegorical short stories were collected in three anthologies: *Dreams* (1890), *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893), and *Dreams and Allegories* (published posthumously in 1923). Stanley argues that the "purpose of Schreiner's allegorical writing was not to „tell a story', but rather to convey an ethical message in an elaborate metaphor" (*Imperialism* 63). In this respect, Schreiner echoes a trend within women's writing as a whole. Olsen, for example, maintains that "one of the most characteristic strains in literature written by women ... is conscience, concern with wrongs to human beings in their time" (42). Schreiner's use of allegory was not confined to her short stories, however – not only is her novella *Trooper Peter Halket* an extended allegory, but her novels, too, contain a number of allegorical passages, such as "The Hunter" in *The Story of an African Farm*. Stanley claims, too, that *From Man to Man* is "structured around allegorical episodes", and that, in journal entries and letters, Schreiner "comments about having written „stories' with titles that correspond to some chapter headings in this novel, and also that she has joined together some of these" (*Imperialism* 63).

Schreiner's non-fictional work largely comprises her political writings on South Africa. Some of these were originally talks delivered at various political gatherings: "The Political Situation" (1896) was originally read by Cronwright in August 1895 at the Kimberley Town Hall, and "A Letter on the Jew" was read at a Jewish Territorial Organisation meeting in Cape Town, 1 July 1906, and published the following day in *The Cape Times*. Many of her writings were in fact published in newspapers, such as "Conscientious Objectors", in *Labour Leader*, 16 March 1916,

and “The Dawn of Civilisation”, in *Nation and Althencæum*, 26 March 1921. Certain of these newspaper articles were later collated and published, for example, *An English South African’s View of the Situation: Words in Season* (1899), and *Closer Union* (1909), which was first published in the *Transvaal Leader*, 22 December 1908. In addition, Schreiner published a number of political pamphlets, such as “Olive Schreiner’s Message to those who refuse Military Service for the sake of Higher Service” (1916), published by *No Conscription Fellowship*, Leaflet no 6, London. Finally, *Thoughts on South Africa* was published in 1923 by Unwin, London. In the latter, Schreiner offers an in-depth analysis of the race issue in South Africa, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between capitalism and labour: Stanley comments that it “is an interesting and still contentious book. It provides considerable evidence of Schreiner’s political prescience” (*Imperialism* 67).

Often, but not necessarily, connected with her political commentaries are Schreiner’s contributions to a discussion on the social position of women. In 1899 “The Woman Question” was published in two parts in *The Cosmopolitan*, a New York-based journal and, in Stanley’s view, *Woman and Labour* “is the most important analytical work to emerge from feminism over the period of Schreiner’s life, and indeed for a good while after her death” (*Imperialism* 81). She describes it as a combination of “theory, polemic and irony” which “advances a social theory of value within a framework concerned with wide-ranging sources of economic and social change” (*Imperialism* 82). Not all of Schreiner’s feminist writings were published in her lifetime, however. For example, “Introduction to the Life of Wollstonecraft and the Rights of Woman”, thought to be written in 1889, was only published in 1994, when it was edited and introduced by Carolyn Burdett. This text was initially intended as an introduction to the centenary edition of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of*

the Rights of Women, but it was never completed and only a fragment remains.

Thus, despite Cronwright's descriptions of Schreiner's lack of productivity after the publication of *The Story of an African Farm*, in reality she produced a significant and coherent body of work. As Stanley points out, "the emergent canon of 'the facts' about Olive Schreiner begins with the originatory characterisation of her through Cronwright-Schreiner's metaphor of 'flawed genius'" ("Mimesis" 37). It is only through examining what Schreiner *actually* produced – those works published during her lifetime and those published posthumously – that an accurate conception of the extent of her writing can be gained.

3 A Woman Writing

3.1 Silences: The Woman Writer's (In)Ability to Write

Despite the fact that Schreiner was a prolific writer in various genres (such as allegories, short stories, polemical tracts, and political essays), she nevertheless experienced what Olsen refers to as “silences” in her writing practice. In this regard, Clayton discusses various explanations that have been put forward for Schreiner's so-called „writer's block' – ranging from “socio-cultural theories of a ‚modern' crisis in the Western World, to psycho-analytical explanations in terms of subconscious conflicts” (*Olive Schreiner* [1983] 16). She draws attention to recent analyses of Schreiner's predicament emanating from feminist theory, analyses which “have become psycho-social, regarding her case as emblematic of the historically conditioned plight of the Victorian woman” (16). Two talks given by Olsen provide a useful framework for an examination of this aspect of Schreiner's writing. In her article “Silences in Literature”, which originated as a talk presented at the Radcliffe Institute in 1962, Olsen discusses the different kinds of silences that occur generally in the writing experience. In a lecture entitled “One Out of Twelve: Writers who are Women in our Century” (1971), she develops some of the ideas she touched on in the earlier piece, and addresses more specifically the different reasons underpinning the marginalisation and silencing of women writers, in particular. In this section, I elaborate on some of the issues Olsen discusses, relating them to Schreiner and her writing – in particular, the “hidden silences” in Schreiner's work. I then discuss the perception that women are unable to fulfil the role of „writer' and „woman'

simultaneously, as well as the problems associated with balancing these roles.

Connected with these issues are the restrictions placed on women writers in relation to *what* they are allowed to experience and *how* they are expected to express that experience. I conclude with a brief discussion of how certain early reviewers responded to Schreiner's works.

Olsen begins her first article by contrasting “*natural* silences ... that necessary time for renewal, lying fallow, gestation, in the natural cycle of creation” with *unnatural* silences, “the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot” (6). There are different manifestations of unnatural silences in the creative process. Some writers do not produce work for years, but Olsen maintains that “Kin to these years-long silences are the *hidden* silences; work aborted, deferred, denied – hidden by the work that does come to fruition” (8). She then places Schreiner among those writers most affected by such hidden silences. Olsen also discusses the single-text phenomenon: “The truly memorable poem, story, or book, then the writer ceasing to be published. Was one work all the writers had in them?” (9). Many critics believe Schreiner to be one such writer. Clayton, for example, contrasts Schreiner with Pauline Smith, and comments that “No one ... bothers about Pauline Smith's lack of productivity after her one and only novel, whereas Schreiner was so obviously trying (and stricken by her failure) to complete her favourite and her biggest novel, *From Man to Man*” (*Olive Schreiner* [1983] 16). Whilst it is true that Schreiner laboured on *From Man to Man* for her entire writing career, I would argue that this struggle is offset by the significant body of work that she did produce in the meantime.

The hidden silences affecting many, if not all, writers are not the only silences Schreiner experienced. Olsen discusses the silences of those marginalised due to their gender – the silences of those struggling with their roles both as *writer* and as *woman*.

In her discussion of women writers of the nineteenth-century, she elaborates on the conflict between writing and motherhood: “of the women whose achievements endure for us in one way or another, nearly all never married ... or married late in their thirties ... I can think of only four ... who married and had children as young women. All had servants” (16). Olsen is not proposing that “women have no need, some say no capacity to create art, because they can ‘create’ babies” (16); rather, she is drawing attention to the difficulty women experience in writing *and* fulfilling the conventional role society expects of them, since “women are traditionally trained to place others’ needs first, to feel these needs as their own” (17). Thus, women are often denied the space and the time to write. It is evident that Schreiner struggled directly with the effect of these constraints on her own life. To illustrate, in a letter to Ellis, she comments, “Perhaps I could care more about life, and work more, if I could have my food cooked for me and my clothes made, like a man” (Cronwright, *Letters* 139).

As hinted above, particularly in the nineteenth century, the roles of “woman” and “writer” were frequently regarded as incompatible. Showalter draws attention to the long history of this view, and claims that “Expression of doubt as to the propriety or efficiency of combining wifedom with authorship came primarily before 1850” (*A Literature of Their Own* 66). She also points out that

It is not until 1893 that we find a matter-of-fact discussion of the way to juggle a family and a career. In “Journalism as a Profession for Women,” Emily Crawford cheerfully advises the prospective journalists to get a good housekeeper and send the children to school. The modern age had arrived. It did not, however, dispel the underlying attitudes in the Victorian treatment of motherhood (it simply changed the terms from “moral” to “psychological”). (68)

If wifedom and motherhood were regarded as the ‘natural’ roles for women, women who desired to write were regarded as abnormal: “one of the most persistent

denigrations of women novelists was that only unhappy and frustrated women wrote books” (84). Women writers were thus already saddled with a certain stigma that needed to be overcome before their work could even begin to be taken seriously. Some women authors attempted to counter this prejudice by adopting a masculine *nom de plume*, since

to their contemporaries, nineteenth-century women writers were women first, artists second. A woman novelist, unless she disguised herself with a male pseudonym, had to expect critics to focus on her femininity and rank her with the other women writers of her day, no matter how diverse their subjects or styles. (73)

Schreiner herself initially published under the pseudonym of Ralph Iron, presumably because she did not want to be judged as a young woman writer from the colonies and have her work compared to that of other women authors: she wanted any criticism she received to be based on her work, not on her gender. In this regard, Showalter, in her discussion of women writers’ adoption of pseudonyms in the nineteenth century, argues that “the height and trademark of feminine role-playing was the male pseudonym. Primarily a way of obtaining serious treatment from critics, the pseudonym also protected women from the righteous indignation of their own relatives”. And she goes on to suggest that in “these aliases, the novelists were renaming themselves in the same way that they named characters in their novels” (58). Interestingly, Schreiner’s use of the *nom de plume* Ralph Iron is not the first instance of her renaming of herself. She was named after her three dead brothers and, as a young child, she was known by her second name, Emilie, or Emmie. At the age of fifteen, she decided that she wanted instead to be called by her first name, Olive (*Life* 76) – possibly as an assertion of her independence and identity during an extremely restless time in her life.

During the nineteenth century, in particular, women were extremely restricted in terms of the education they received, a fact that also impacted on the seriousness with which their art was viewed. Showalter argues that, for women, the “will to write inevitably provoked some kind of hostile response”, and that, when they had “managed to resolve the conflicts between obedience and resistance, womanhood and vocation, for themselves, they discovered that they faced a critical standard that denied them both femininity and art” (*A Literature of Their Own* 72). This critical double standard meant that “women writers, who were almost all self-taught, were expected to meet male standards of scholarship if they ventured to use their knowledge” (42) – a prospect that was obviously daunting, given that women were not provided equal access to education. Showalter expands on this imbalance, maintaining that “Women writers were deprived of education because of their sex, not because of their class. For the middle-class Victorian girl, the departure of a brother for school was a painful awakening to her inferior status; the scene echoes in English fiction from George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) to Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* (1897)” (41).

Schreiner, too, experienced such discrimination first-hand. Although Cronwright refers to her lack of a formal education and her status as a self-taught genius, she did have some access to schooling, however. He mentions that she and her siblings had a tutor, Mr Fish, but adds the qualification that “This tuition, to whatever extent, was the only teaching Olive had; what else she knew she had picked up from her cultured and brilliant mother and from her own insatiable reading” (*Life* 68). Her formal education was thus extremely limited, in contrast with the further schooling offered to her brothers. Her elder brothers, Fred and Theo, were both educated at the Wesleyan College in Taunton, England, and graduated from the University of

London. Schreiner's younger brother, Will, was educated in South Africa by the Rev. Mr Templeton, first in Bedford and then in Grahamstown. He then received a BA from the South African College in Cape Town, and later attended Downing College, Cambridge University. However, although Schreiner did not receive an extended formal education, she went on to become a governess – no doubt because suitably qualified candidates for that role were in short supply in the colonial South Africa of that time.

In a letter responding to a request for an interview, she writes about her reluctance to discuss the ways in which she had become educated:

I never went to any school; yet, to give you the true story of my education, would mean the rending open of my heart before you, the describing to you of the (to me) most sacred and beautiful hours of my childhood and girlhood, the books I loved and studied, the scenes I visited, the influence of a thousand beneficent and stimulating things upon my mind, matters to me so sacred and intimate that I would not discuss them with my closest friend – yet you would ask me to pour them out to you, an absolute stranger.

(Cronwright, *Life* 295-296)

Nevertheless, a brief outline of some of the literature Schreiner was exposed to demonstrates how well-read she actually was, considering her circumstances.

According to Cronwright, many of the books that she read were borrowed from the Cradock Public Library, and so he bequeathed her books, as well as his own, to this library after his death (*Life* 393).

Schreiner read extensively and in various areas, but I shall only mention a few of the books that especially influenced her. One of these was Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, which was given to her by Willie Bertram. In a letter to Ellis on 28 March 1884, Schreiner writes that, although Spencer was not as important to her then as he once had been, he had helped her to "believe in a unity underlying all nature" (*Life*

82). She also read John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* several times and, significantly, in her novel *Undine*, *Political Economy* is the eponymous protagonist's favourite book and, in *The Story of an African Farm*, Waldo is beaten for reading this tract. Mill greatly influenced Schreiner's ideas about the position of women in society, but many of her ideas about „the woman question' are also derived from her readings of Wollstonecraft. In *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft examines the role of women in society, and establishes the notion that women's inequality is a social construction. She also wrote about these notions in her novella, *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), and feminist tract, *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) – which was left a fragment after her death. Interestingly, Schreiner follows a similar path in terms of *From Man to Man* and *Woman and Labour*. Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man*, too, had a great impact on Schreiner's thinking, and Rebekah in *From Man to Man* not only has this book on her shelf, but also critiques Darwinian ideas about the survival of the fittest, as indicated earlier.

Berkman suggests that a “quick review of Schreiner's reading during her adolescence readily reveals her affinity with rationalist and romantic idealists who emboldened her criticism of dominant cultural institutions and values” (20). She lists a number of poets and philosophers who influenced Schreiner in this respect, namely John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Plato, Shelley, Thomas Gibbon, Spinoza, Thoreau, Coleridge, Ruskin and Goethe (20). Significantly, Schreiner named both herself – in her adopted pseudonym, Ralph Iron – and one of the characters, Waldo, in *The Story of an African Farm*, after Emerson. And, according to Cronwright, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Schreiner re-read throughout her life: “Of all the books that appealed to her when young, Gibbon's great history is the only one of which her knowledge grew more profound

and accurate, and for which her love and admiration went on increasing with age” (*Life* 130). Gerald Monsman, too, discusses a few of the other authors Schreiner read and was possibly influenced by, namely Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë and Thomas Hardy (26-27). Thus, it is self-evident that she compensated for her lack of formal education with extensive and wide-ranging reading, both literary and non-fictional.

In addition to being bound by societal expectations relating to roles and behaviour, nineteenth-century women writers were also limited in terms of the topics about which it was considered appropriate for them to write. However, Olsen points out that, even contemporaneously, “Women writers are still suspect [sic] as unnatural if they concern themselves with aspects of their experience, interests, being, beyond the traditionally defined women’s sphere” (41). In the past, she maintains, this implicit injunction frequently resulted in self-censorship, as was the case with Anaïs Nin, who somewhat paradoxically advocated that women writers limit their writing to a “feminine sensibility that would not threaten man” (qtd in Olsen 43). Censorship obviously silences creativity, and may appear in a variety of guises: “Deletions, omissions, abandonment of the medium ... Publishers’ censorship, refusing subject matter or treatment as ‚not suitable’ or ‚no market for’. Self-censorship. Religious, political censorship” (Olsen 9). Schreiner, for example, initially struggled to find a publisher willing to accept *The Story of an African Farm*, due to concerns about the moral content of the novel – and, more specifically, Lyndall’s decision not to marry the father of her child. In a letter to Ellis, Schreiner recounts her outrage that Chapman (from Chapman & Hall, the eventual publishers of the novel) had asked her to alter the book by putting in a “few sentences saying that Lyndall was secretly married to that man, as if she wasn’t married to him the British public would think it

wicked, and Smiths, the railway booksellers, would not put it on their stalls” (*Life* 156). Chapman, as it turns out, was realistic in his prognosis of the public’s response to Schreiner’s book: it was met with controversy in South Africa, too, as Cronwright notes, explaining how the Grahamstown Public Library refused to stock it on their shelves. Even Schreiner’s family were shocked at the novel’s content; she writes in her diary that “Fred has written to say he doesn’t want me to go to Eastbourne, or have anything to do with him, my *African Farm* brings him into trouble” (*Life* 170).

Negative reactions to *The Story of an African Farm*, based mostly on self-righteous disapproval, were however balanced by equal demonstrations of support. In 1887, writing in response to descriptions of the book as “immoral” and “blasphemous”, Canon MacColl suggested that “This is the exaggeration of prejudice” and that no evil woman could have written the book (Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 73). He commented further that “the value of [*The Story of an African Farm*], besides its great literary power, is that it looks Agnosticism fairly in the face” (Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 72). Edward B. Aveling, writing for *Progress, a Monthly Magazine of Advanced Thought* in September 1883, described *The Story of an African Farm* as a “remarkable work”, and commented that the book is “cosmopolitan and human” (Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 67). This reviewer’s highest praise lay in his comparison of Schreiner with Charles Dickens: he suggested that “the dead novelist has a worthy follower in this young writer” (68). Also discussing *The Story of an African Farm*, in an extract from “Theories and Practice of Modern Fiction”, published in December 1883 for *The Fortnightly Review*, Henry Norman acknowledged the youth and inexperience of the author, while admiring her original characters, fresh and humorous style, and the moral power of the story (Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 70). Schreiner’s allegorical short stories were also

favourably reviewed. Arthur Symons' review of *Dreams*, in the *Althenæum* in January 1891, commented on her use of allegory: he claimed that "Miss Schreiner has realized more and more the capacity of the form, its power in her hands, and she has given us, in this volume of allegories, her most deeply-felt „message”" (Clayton, *Olive Schreiner* [1983] 78). He described the allegories as "Written in exquisite prose ... they have the essential qualities of poetry, and are, indeed, poems in prose" (78).

Schreiner's work was not only admired for its literary value, but also for its impact specifically on women. In her article entitled "The Victorian Novel and its Readers", for example, Kate Flint discusses the recollections of Annabel Grant-Duff Jackson who recounted the story of how a fellow pupil at Cheltenham Ladies' College had smuggled in a copy of Schreiner's novel: Jackson remarked that "the whole sky seemed aflame and many of us became violent feminists" (33). Moreover, Schreiner's work not only appealed to contemporary women readers' desire for literary representations of alternative kinds of femininity, but also responded to the need for female literary role models. In this regard, in *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar elaborate on the ways in which the woman writer is alienated from the (male) canonical works that are held up as models to which to aspire. They write back to Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, in which Bloom highlights the struggle to write that is experienced by male authors in relation to the works that have been written by previous great writers, and contend, by contrast, that the woman writer experiences an "anxiety of authorship" in which she doubts whether she can write at all. Gilbert and Gubar ask:

What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are ... overtly and covertly patriarchal? If the vexed and vexing polarities of angel and monster, sweet dumb Snow White and fierce mad Queen, are major images literary traditions offer women, how does such imagery

influence the ways in which women attempt the pen?
(The Mad Woman in the Attic 45-46)

The woman writer desires to place herself within a women's tradition in order to find a model that "proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible" (*The Mad Woman in the Attic 49*). However, in attempting to do this, she experiences a split in consciousness. As Jacobus comments, "At once within this culture and outside it, the woman writer experiences not only exclusion, but an internalised split" (20).

Schreiner's own struggles to mediate the roles of writer and woman were to directly impact on concerns expressed within her writings, and to lead her to create fictional works that challenged established notions of sanctioned roles for women.

3.2 Mother Trouble

Showalter, in discussing developments in feminist literary criticism, points out that "feminist critics turned their attention to the analysis of mother-daughter relations" in order to question whether "women's writing is characterised by ... ,a female poetics of affiliation,' dependent on the daughter's relation to the mother" (*The New Feminist Criticism 7*). It is significant, then, that Schreiner's relationship with various maternal figures in some ways subscribes to Gilbert and Gubar's notion of the woman writer who "searches for a female model not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her ,femininity' but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors" (*The Mad Woman in the Attic 50*). Schreiner's mother and various surrogate mother-figures provided her with a view of an alternative feminine identity that may have influenced her revisioning of feminine roles in her own life and

of feminine stereotypes in her fiction, and it is in this light that I consider Marion Friedmann's theory that Schreiner's compulsion to write stemmed from the difficult relationship that she had with her mother.

An ambivalent relationship with maternal figures is typical of many woman writers. For example, in describing her experience of her mother, Schreiner herself comments: "my mother never cared for her children especially her daughters as soon as they were older, say eight or nine. But of her tiny babies and children she was *passionately fond*" (Cronwright, *Letters* 287). Nevertheless, it is surely significant that two of Schreiner's female protagonists are named after her mother: Rebekah, in *From Man to Man*, takes her mother's first name, and Lyndall, in *The Story of an African Farm*, is derived from Rebecca Schreiner's maiden name. Significantly, Roberta Mazzanti describes the character Lyndall as being "torn between being a childless mother and being an unmothered child" (128) – a description of Schreiner's most famous woman character which could aptly be used to describe Schreiner herself, who had several miscarriages and an infant that died soon after birth. Moreover, in a letter to Cronwright, Schreiner comments, "my mother has never been a mother to me; *I have had no mother* (*Life* 245, emphasis added). The ambivalent effect that Schreiner's relationship with her mother may have had on the former's writing career is therefore an intriguing issue.

A brief discussion of Schreiner's parents, Rebecca and Gottlob Schreiner, provides some background to Schreiner's relationship with her mother. (The biographical information sketched here is predominantly derived from Cronwright's *The Life of Olive Schreiner*, unless otherwise indicated). Schreiner's parents arrived at the Cape from England in February 1838, where they proceeded to live as missionaries – mostly on a number of isolated missionary stations on the frontier of

the British colony. Rebecca was a highly intelligent, well-educated woman from a middle-class background, the child of a Congregational minister, and Gottlob was born in Germany, the son of a shoemaker: the couple were apparently not well-matched in terms of education, class and temperament. Before their marriage, two other highly-educated, wealthier men had vied for Rebecca's hand, and yet she chose to marry Gottlob. Many reasons have been adduced for this decision. Karel Schoeman, for example, argues that Rebecca and Gottlob "were hardly well-suited partners in marriage, but they were setting out to bear the light of civilisation to the darkness of Africa, primed with youth, courage and unshakeable self-confidence, and giving no thought to the desirability or feasibility of their self-imposed task" (18). Rebecca believed in the work that she was setting out to do, strongly influenced by the attitudes instilled in her by her religious father, Reverend Samuel Lyndall, and inspired by her half-sister Elizabeth Rolland's missionary work in South Africa. However, a desire to escape the constraints of her severely restricted lifestyle may have been an additional factor in her decision to marry Gottlob and leave for South Africa: as a white middle-class woman, charity or philanthropic work offered one of the few escapes she could legitimately pursue from the domestic claustrophobia of the household. Such pursuits were viewed as extensions of a woman's domestic role, and therefore a viable form of engagement in work outside of the „natural' role of wife and mother. The importance of this philanthropic work in Rebecca's life, in turn, had an impact on her children – as can be seen in Theo's and Ettie's later involvement in the temperance movements of the time. Schreiner's own support of the „Boers' and „natives' during the South African Wars, and of the women's suffrage movement in the early twentieth century, may also be viewed as an extension of a philanthropic impulse. Stanley, for example, claims that "Schreiner's support for women's suffrage

was always as part of full adult suffrage, and this in turn was linked to her commitment to democracy within the framework of a feminist and socialist analysis of capitalism, „the labour question’, and „the problem of men’ as well as women” (*Imperialism* 37).

Most researchers into Schreiner’s life, however, describe her relationship with her mother in negative terms. Friedmann’s theory that Schreiner’s compulsion to write stemmed from this relationship, has nevertheless met with mixed responses. Thus Stanley argues that “It is difficult now to take Friedmann’s arguments seriously, not because she is a Freudian or interested in psychoanalysis, but because she is such a wretchedly flat-footed butcher of psychoanalytic orthodoxies of the 1950s” (113). Ruth First and Ann Scott, by contrast, approach Friedmann’s study of the relationship between Schreiner’s personality and her work somewhat more appreciatively, describing it as “coherent” (22). They agree with Friedmann’s description of Schreiner as neurotic, her argument that “punishment, self-punishment, and motherlessness [are] the insistent themes of the fiction” (22), and her proposal that Schreiner’s recurring bouts of illness were psychosomatic. Still they identify problems in Friedmann’s psychoanalytic approach, and maintain that:

It tends to be reductionist, collapsing adolescent or adult behaviour solely into a defence against infantile hurts. It discounts the family’s structural or cultural relationship to the society in which it is placed. It interprets political activism as the expression of a purely personal difficulty, and although we do not deny the patterns within the political and personal choices Olive made, we feel that Friedmann’s perspective ignores important areas of her experience. (22)

Friedmann’s at times exaggerated portrait of the relationship between Schreiner and her mother is, in fact, increasingly viewed as problematic, particularly with regard to her over-reliance on Cronwright’s *The Life* and *The Letters* as primary sources since,

as suggested earlier, both in reality should be treated as heavily doctored versions of Schreiner's life from the pen of an estranged husband. Moreover, though there is undoubted value in the suggestion that Schreiner's relationship with her mother was a significant factor motivating her compulsion to write and in the themes that preoccupied her work, there are alternative views to Friedmann's depiction of this relationship.

Rebecca is generally perceived to have been a highly gifted and fascinating woman, intelligent and cultured. She led a challenging life, bearing the larger burden of responsibility for raising her children in a harsh environment, mourning the loss of several of her children and, eventually, living in abject poverty, unable to support her family and reliant on the generosity of her eldest daughter, Kate Findlay, and Kate's husband, John Findlay. On the one hand, Rebecca was extremely religious, strict, and conservative with regard to the place of women in society: her moral code "stressed the primacy of duty, the sinfulness of enjoyment and self-indulgence, the sanctity of home and family and the presence of an ever-watchful God" (First and Scott 35). Schreiner herself, however, was a self-proclaimed agnostic from a very young age. In letters to Cronwright, she remembers with bitterness the beatings she received as a young child, and recounts two incidents in particular as follows:

I had two great whippings when I was a child and they did me such immense harm that I think they might have permanently influenced my life. They made me hate everything in the heavens above and the earth beneath ... I can feel as though I were lying there yet and the unutterable bitter rebellion and hatred against them all in my heart, and the deep resolve I made when I sat on the box beside the bed to spend all my life in helping weak things against strong; and it is still to me today the most maddening thing in the world to think of a thing, beast or human being, being held fast and struck.
(*Life* 250)

First and Scott note, in this regard, that in her "role as mother, Rebecca was a

powerful authority figure in the home. Olive claimed that the beatings she received made her hate „God and man” (52-53). The first “great whipping” Schreiner remembers occurred when she was five and was given “fifty strokes with a bunch of quince rods tied together” (*Life* 250) for using the Dutch word “*ach*”. At the age of seven, she was given fifty cuts with a small cane for disobeying her older sister, Alice, and catching raindrops in her hand (*Life* 250). Schreiner thus connected her hatred of abuse and her desire to “help weak things against strong” to her own experiences of the corporal punishment meted out to her by her mother.

On the other hand, Rebecca validated Schreiner’s love of writing: the latter’s greatest “desire as a child was that her mother should understand her” (First and Scott 52). Although this was not always the case, Berkman claims that one “of her most cherished occasions was her mother’s response to reading a story Schreiner wrote at about age twelve. Rebecca awoke her in the middle of the night, sobbing, her arms around her daughter’s legs at the foot of the bed” (17). In addition, Berkman notes that “Rebecca defended her daughter against sibling mockery of her frequent spouting aloud to herself the stories she invented. She also encouraged Schreiner’s talents by asking her to read poetry to her while she cooked or sewed” (18). Thus, “during her early years Schreiner fell in love with Milton and by age seven acquired a command of Coleridge and Tennyson. Simultaneously, she discovered in her mother a responsive mind, „keen as a rapier”” (Berkman 18). Self-evidently, in this respect, Schreiner and Rebecca shared an intellectual rapport and love of poetry, despite Rebecca’s strictly Puritanical moral code.

Schreiner only lived with her parents until the age of twelve, since the family were forced to separate when Gottlob was declared bankrupt in 1866. Although Rebecca wished that her daughter could continue to live with her, economic

circumstances dictated that Schreiner be housed elsewhere until she was old enough to find a job for herself. In a letter to Kate Findlay on 25 August 1871, Rebecca expresses the conflictual emotions she experienced as a result: “I am quite longing for [Olive] to share this home and at the same time that does not lessen my gratitude to Lilly for offering her a home when I had none for myself and so none to offer my child. It will be a great comfort to me to have her next” (“The Findlay Family Papers”). Although Schreiner was never to live with her mother again, she maintained their relationship via correspondence and visited her annually. Moreover, later, Rebecca accepted her daughter’s decision to move England, recognising what was best for her child, despite her own feelings. In a letter to Kate Findlay on 30 November 1880, Rebecca discusses Schreiner’s decision to move: “I daresay you have heard that dear Olive is thinking of going to England early in the year. As I think it will be a good move for her I am glad she is going but it will be a terrible trial for me to part from her. You see we have hitherto always managed to meet once a year and that was always something to anticipate” (“The Findlay Family Papers”). In later life, however, Schreiner was to become closer to her mother. Stanley, for example, points out that, in retrospect, Schreiner “recognised the considerable strains of [Rebecca] (rather than her unworldly and childlike husband) having had the responsibility for bringing up their large number of children in conditions of frequent danger” (*Imperialism* 110). And, Claire Kahane describes Rebecca as the “psychic ground for her daughter’s feminist voice”, arguing that she “confirmed [Schreiner’s] intellectual and literary precocity” (81).

In addition to commenting on Schreiner’s relationship with her own mother, it is important to discuss her relationship with surrogate mother-figures, such as her sister, Ettie, Mary Brown and Erilda Cawood, since, as Friedmann suggests, “Nothing

influences the development of the child's personality more than the personalities of others, and the influence of the parents or their deputies is greater than the influence of other people" (37). After Gottlob's financial difficulties and eventual bankruptcy, Schreiner left home to live with her older siblings, Theo and Ettie, in Cradock, but her religious dissidence became a source of discord, as her agnosticism conflicted with their religious fervour. First and Scott point out that, "her relationship with Ettie ... became very tense – indeed persecutory by Olive's account – and her departure from Cradock was followed by great fits of remorse on Ettie's part" (56). Ettie's influence on Schreiner was not completely adverse, however: Clayton draws attention to the fact that "Ettie's early independence and her public role as an impassioned public speaker on temperance issues influenced Olive when she was young and demonstrated how a degree of public activity and influence was possible for women" (*Olive Schreiner* [1997] 8).

Schreiner thereafter lived with various relatives and family friends before beginning her life as a governess moving from farm to farm. In 1873, while she was visiting her two older sisters in Fraserburg, Schreiner met Mary Brown, wife of Dr John Brown. Brown was a "writer, public speaker, reformer, social worker, and future advocate of the rights of women and Africans" (Berkman 23). When the Browns left South Africa for Edinburgh in 1876, at Schreiner's request they sent her an application form for the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, when Schreiner arrived in England, she did not have sufficient funds to pay for medical school, and so decided to take up nursing, but her poor health prevented her from studying further. Significantly, however, her abiding interest in medicine is reflected in the fact that, in her will, she stipulated that funds be provided for a medical scholarship for women at the South African College in Cape Town (later the University of Cape Town), to be

administered “without reference to race or colour or religion” (*Life* 392). Moreover, in addition to assisting Schreiner’s medical ambitions, the Browns attempted to help her publish *The Story of an African Farm* by delivering the manuscript to an English publisher, David Douglas, who in the event rejected it (*Life* 147). The novel was eventually published in 1890, with a second edition appearing later that year, dedicated to Mary Brown. Indeed, it might be argued that Brown provided a blueprint for the roles that Schreiner herself was to fulfil later in her life, since the latter, too, became a writer, reformer, social worker and advocate of the rights of women.

Schreiner’s relationship with Erilda Cawood began in 1879 when she arrived at the Cawood’s farm in Ganna Hoek to work as a governess. Berkman suggests that living with the Cawoods gave Schreiner the opportunity to experience alternative and “more appealing models for female selfhood than those Rebecca presented and prescribed” (22). First and Scott similarly draw attention to Schreiner’s desire for “the older woman’s affection and approval” (76), and describe Cawood as someone in whom Schreiner could confide. After leaving the Cawoods in August 1879, Schreiner was to continue a lifelong friendship with Erilda Cawood, maintained mostly through letters. This relationship was interrupted for a brief time by the deeply religious Cawood’s disapproval of Schreiner’s free-thinking. Berkman claims, however, that “Cawood, gripped by her own and her children’s devotion to Schreiner, eventually resumed their friendship”, and that Schreiner’s letters to Cawood “are filled with affection and are among her most humorous and ingenious” (22).

In conclusion, Schreiner’s relationship with strong, independent women – such as her mother, her sister, Brown and Cawood – self-evidently influenced her perceptions of the place of women in society. Thus, although she was influenced by a number of prominent male thinkers, and developed both personal and intellectual

associations with these figures, she also forged relationships with women who, in certain respects at least, presented her with alternative, unconventional role models, and who exerted a profound influence on her development both as a woman and as a writer.

4 The Fallen Woman

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on how Schreiner destabilises Victorian notions of the fallen woman by conceiving of her female protagonists not only as *unfallen*, but also as New Women. In particular, I examine how Schreiner subverts the idea of feminine transgression by undermining the binary between ‚pure‘ and ‚fallen‘ – and, more specifically, by realigning the relationship between the fallen woman and marriage. In a letter to Karl Pearson, interestingly, Schreiner levels the accusation: “You have studied and thought out so deeply the position of woman ... Why have you not given the same thought to man?” (Rive, *Letters* 135). Given her sentiments here, it is important therefore to elucidate how she herself attempts to address and transform notions of both masculinity *and* femininity in her writings. Hence, I discuss Schreiner’s characterisation of the ‚fallen men‘ who are necessarily implicated in the process by which fallen women are produced, and provide a brief analysis of the ‚new man‘ that is offered in her fiction.

4.2 Unfallen Women

A useful framework for an analysis of the trope of the fallen woman in Victorian times can be found in the concept of boundaries and their transgression, with marriage forming the boundary between the public and private spheres. Watt, for example, suggests that it is “only when the norms and expectations of Victorian marriage are

taken into account that attitudes to fallen women can be understood” (37-38). The notion of the fallen woman is predicated on her digression from normative expectations, her rejection of sanctioned roles for women – specifically marriage and motherhood, and her breaking of social boundaries. Anthony Voss argues that in *From Man to Man*, “Schreiner shows in the lives of Rebekah and Bertie that ‚pain’ does not matter and that women’s pain is socially structured: the central structure is marriage, which imprisons Rebekah in a corrupt dyad and isolates Bertie from any independent ‚work’ but the traffic of her own body” (135-136). Significantly, in a letter to Cronwright, Schreiner emphasises the importance of prostitution as an issue in *From Man to Man*, and comments that “To me there is nothing else in the world that touches me in the same way. You will see that if you read my novel ... all other matters seem to me small compared to matters of sex, and prostitution is its most agonising central point” (Cronwright, *Letters* 265). In *Woman and Labour*, which can be considered the political articulation of the philosophy that she expresses fictionally in *From Man to Man*, Schreiner posits the idea that marriage without love and prostitution are synonymous and indistinguishable. However, although *From Man to Man* is most obviously the text in which Schreiner’s ideas about marriage are presented in fictional form, these ideas in fact appear in all her novels – for example, in Undine’s marriage to George Blair in *Undine*, and in Lyndall’s rejection of her lover’s marriage proposal in *The Story of an African Farm*. In the following section, I therefore examine how Schreiner reframes and interrogates the relationship between marriage and the concept of sexual dishonour.

4.2.1 Undine

In *Undine*, Schreiner destabilises Victorian notions of sexual impropriety through her characterisation of the heroine's marriage. However, although Undine's position as a fallen woman is not overt, her marriage to George Blair reflects the theme Schreiner will later explore in *Woman and Labour*: marriage as prostitution.

In the novel, Undine is courted by three members of the Blair family: the two brothers – the pseudo-intellectual Henry and the emotionally cold Albert – and their father, the grotesque George. The latter, for example, is described as a “bloated, leaden-eyed creature” (76) who can buy beautiful objects but never possess them: “The flesh-encrusted soul that looked out through the hard blue eyes in their setting of red fat would know nothing of the possession of that which had beauty” (77). George is the first to propose to Undine, but at this point the “idea of being any man's wife, of bearing any man's children, was absurd ... to her” (89). Later the same day, the younger son, Henry, sends Undine a love letter, in which he informs her that “For her sake he had given it all up – fortune, friends, rank” (90) and asks her to marry him. After she burns this letter, she reflects on the two marriage proposals she has received and disparagingly concludes: “The father asked for my body and offered me gold in return; *he* asks my soul, spirit, *and* body, and has nothing in the universe to give but a pair of great staring woman's eyes, and a soft brain, crammed to bursting and without a particle of sense in it” (91). However, despite her initial dislike of the older brother, Albert – she describes him as an “equally proportioned mixture of ice and iron” (80) – Undine nevertheless later falls in love with and agrees to marry him. Soon after her engagement, she visits her grandmother, where she receives a letter in which he abruptly terminates their relationship. Reading this news by the stream that she often

sits near, she places the letter in her mouth, and chews it “fine between her grinding teeth” (113). A while later, after staring at a white feather bobbing in the muddy water, she begins running away from the scene, an environment which is personified as pitiless and cruel, and which mocks and torments her:

It was on her, on her, wherever she went, that great blood-red eye, and the great brown hill opposite with its white chalk road was like a leering human face that laughed at her, jeered at her, mocked at her; and the stones; and the trees – they all had a hidden sneer about them. „Fool! fool! fool!’ they cried. And the blue cloudless sky overhead was so hard and pitiless, like a righteous human soul which has no mercy for the erring. „O sky, blue, cloudless sky, have pity, have pity on me!’ she cried in her madness ... They drove her madder, madder, the sky, the sun, the earth; till she writhed in her pain, like a trodden worm, on the ground and stones.
(114)

She returns to her grandmother’s house, “with her head drooping on her breast and her arms hanging heavily” (114) and, in an attempt to deal with her heartbreak, she gives all her dresses and ribbons to the maid, Nancy, and obsessively begins cleaning the house. Nancy later tells her own lover how, after Undine gave her the finery, the latter began cleaning the parlour. When Nancy tries to prevent her from polishing the chairs, Undine insists, “„No, I like to do it,’ says she, and there she sits a-rubbing at one leg of a chair for five minutes or more, like as if she was in a dream like” (122). It is in this mundane domestic act, rendered parodic because of its over-performance, that Undine attempts to deal with her emotions via a process of deep repression. This is especially symbolised in a vision she has a few nights later, after waking from sleep, of a feather sinking to the bottom of the river: “It had moved very restlessly, but deep down, at the bottom of the pool, it was very still and restful. The mocking sun with its jeering blood-red eye could never look through to see what lay there” (123). The image of the drowned but imperturbable feather prefigures Undine’s suicidal

thoughts when she stands next to the pool, which “seemed so still and quiet, it seemed to lure her to itself” (123). Though she attempts to justify her self-destructive impulse: “I cannot help it – it is not cowardly – I am too tired – so tired. He does not want me any more. There is nothing in the world, and I am so weary” (123), she then contemplates an alternative to suicide which, though less absolute, is no less abject: “Might I not serve him!” (123). Her way of „serving Albert’ is to marry his father and, in so doing, have the means to provide Albert with money, since George has decided to cut off both his sons. Indeed, she literally „sells’ herself to George Blair, by stipulating: “If you will settle on me, before our marriage, fifty thousand pounds in cash, to be mine absolutely, to do exactly as I please with, then I will marry you as soon as you wish. I do not love you, but I will be a good wife to you” (127). Ironically, however, Undine’s sacrifice is unnecessary, since Albert himself marries a wealthy woman. Moreover, on reading about Undine’s marriage to his father in the newspaper, “his flickering faith in women died and he held his father’s creed – the creed that all women have their value in coins, though some mount high” (129). Undine’s response to Albert’s marriage bans, published simultaneously, is very different though: “There, below the notice of her own sale, stood that other notice. She read it and a burning mist gathered in her eyes ... For nothing, all for nothing; he had no need of her” (129). The only reason Undine has agreed to marry George is a mercenary one – so that she can support Albert financially. She can thus ultimately be considered a fallen woman since she married without love, and has exchanged herself for money – a view highlighted by the chapters entitled “Sold her Love”, in which she offers herself to George, and “A Very Wicked Woman”, which outlines her unsatisfactory and loveless married life.

Schreiner emphasises Undine’s status as a fallen woman by paralleling her

story with that of one of Albert's former lovers, and Undine's fate as a „prostitute in marriage' is reflected in the fate of this surrogate figure. When Undine first sees the as-yet unnamed woman, she is immediately struck by her presence: she is described as “of more than middle height, with a magnificently developed yet graceful figure” (75). Significantly, the woman's cheeks are described as being “as dark and brilliantly coloured as the rare hothouse flowers she wore in her bosom” (75), since the erotic and exotic connotations of the flower imagery here recall the Fall from the Garden of Eden. Undine desires what this woman has: she “looked at her as she passed, filled with genuine admiration, but the woman seemed quite unconscious of her presence. She loves someone, and she is happy, thought Undine; if I could love I would be happy, too” (75). The next time she encounters the woman, she does not recall where she has seen her before but, watching her interactions with her infant child, “She felt attracted by her, not because of her neglected beauty, not by the vague impression that they had met before, but by a look in the dark eyes which drew her” (134). Arguably, this attraction is premised on Undine's subconscious recognition of an obscure affinity with the woman. The way in which conventional Victorian society treats fallen women, however, is reflected in the neighbours' self-righteous designation of the woman as a “wicked woman” (134), since she has a child out of wedlock. Significantly, Schreiner entitles the chapter describing Undine's married life with George “A Very Wicked Woman”, thus further underlying the similitude between Undine and the fallen woman. Undine, however, envies this woman, and particularly the evident love she bears for her child: “with her empty heart, and the knowledge that she, too, soon would be mother of a child, not the child of love, but of loathing – Undine with her riches and her good name envied the dark woman her disgrace, her baby, and her rags” (134-135).

Undine's connection with the fallen woman is again emphasised in the scene in which she looks in on the woman in her modest dwelling after she herself has been caught in a storm: "It was a strange reversal in the order of things – the honoured wife of the rich man in her velvet and jewels standing out in the night storm and gazing in with envious eyes at the home where poverty and shame had taken their abode" (136). Undine then witnesses the baby's death, after which the mother forces it into her arms and heads out into the snow, no doubt to die of exposure. Undine stares into the baby's face and thinks that she sees Albert's face, which "haunted her day and night ... Was she not to look into the face of a dead child without seeing it even there, also?" (138). Having drawn the baby's handkerchief over its face, she reads the name beautifully embroidered in one corner, and discovers the identity of its father:

His dead baby. For she knew now that it was no madness that showed her the old haunting face in the features of the little child. She knew now where she had seen that woman's face before with its lustrous eyes and brilliant tints; remembered now the old hints and stories which she had regarded as lies but which tonight came back to her as truths. (138)

Undine first learns of the existence of Albert's lover long before she actually encounters her. As a young child, she heard the gossiping Miss Mell and Mrs Goodman relate the story of how Alice Brown had dived into a great pool to save the drowning Albert. The literal „fall' into the pool can symbolically be linked to Alice's fall from so-called respectable society. The two women were shocked at this improper behaviour, and viewed Alice Brown's actions as "wanting in modesty and self-respect" (41). Undine's later suspicion about the identity of the fallen woman and the father of her child is confirmed for the reader by her servant, Nancy, who again relates the details of this story to her own lover. Nancy, who has been sent by Undine to take appropriate steps to dispatch of the dead baby, sees a container under the bed which

contains baby clothes and a beautiful box, on which is engraved in gilt lettering the name “Alice Brown” and “something about a drowning” (140). The box, which contains a picture of Albert, a couple of burnt-out cigars and one of Albert’s gloves (140), is no doubt a gift he gave Alice to thank her for saving his life (41) – and it contains her most precious mementos of their love affair.

When Undine first encounters this woman, without knowing that the latter is in love with Albert, she envies her because she feels that if she too were in love she would be happy. Later, without knowing that Albert is the father of the woman’s baby, she envies her not being alone, because she has “the child of love” (134). Thus, in the relationship between Albert and Alice, and in Undine’s envy of this fallen woman, Schreiner depicts what Undine’s own fate might have been. In this novel then, Schreiner problematises the notion of sexual defilement through her characterisation of a central woman protagonist who is ‘fallen’ despite her ‘respectable’ marriage, since it is a loveless, mercenary and empty relationship, and another more obviously ‘fallen’ woman who, though she has been used and discarded, has nevertheless briefly known sexual fulfilment and maternal love.

4.2.2 Lyndall

In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner develops her view of marriage without love as being tantamount to prostitution through her portrayal of the central character, Lyndall. When *The Story of an African Farm* was first published, many readers were horrified that Lyndall does not want to marry the father of her baby, and they responded negatively to what they perceived as her unconventional and immoral stance. On the contrary, however, Lyndall’s decision not to marry *is* an ethical and

principled one, since she does not view her lover as a potential life-long partner, and she considers marriage without love as “the uncleanliest traffic that defiles the world” (190). Moreover, she is highly critical of conventional notions of marriage, domesticity and motherhood as the only fulfilling life for women. This is possibly why she claims she cannot marry her lover, and she attempts to explain to him her reasons: “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” (237)

Lyndall recognises that marriage to her lover (an unnamed stranger who is only identified by the initials RR on the ring he gives her) will not bring her happiness, and rejects the notion that women are expected to marry and have children. Gilbert and Gubar argue that, in this respect, “Lyndall, who will either take a man without his name (her lover) or a name without the man (Gregory Rose), drives a wedge between language and male presence that subverts masculine authority” (*No Man’s Land* 61-62). Lyndall’s rejection of the conventional role for women is pointedly held in opposition to the behaviour of Tant’ Sannie, who consumes men. After her return from finishing school, Lyndall and Waldo have a conversation in which she claims: “It is Tant’ Sannie who buries husband [sic] one after another” (195), and contrasts Tant’ Sannie’s voracious appetite for men with an imagined future in which men and women can meet as equals and as both sexually and economically independent beings:

Then when that time comes ... when love is no more bought or sold, when it is not a means of making bread, when each woman’s life is filled with earnest, independent labour, then love will come to her, a strange sudden sweetness breaking in upon her earnest work; not sought for, but found. Then, but not now – (195)

Lyndall imagines a future in which women will not have to marry in order to survive, but instead have the freedom to marry for love, if they so choose.

In this regard, Schreiner's allegory, "Life's Gifts" illustrates the choices available to women:

I saw a woman sleeping. In her sleep she dreamt Life stood before her, and held in each hand a gift – in the one Love, in the other Freedom. And she said to the woman, "Choose!"
 And the woman waited long; and she said, "Freedom!"
 And Life said, "Thou hast well chosen. If thou hadst said, 'Love,' I would have given thee that thou didst ask for; and I would have gone from thee, and returned to thee no more. Now, the day will come when I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in on hand."
 I heard the woman laugh in her sleep. (*Dreams* 115-116)

The allegory, in which Schreiner envisions a future in which women would not have to choose between love and freedom but would enjoy both, embodies the idea that she develops more fully in *The Story of an African Farm*. For example, when Lyndall's Stranger (235) questions why she does not wish to marry him, she responds by expressing her fear that, if she were to do so, she would "never be free again" (236). Furthermore, she claims that, "if I had been married to you for a year, I should have come to my senses, and seen that your hands and your voice are like the hands and voice of any other man. I cannot quite see that now. But it is all madness" (237). Lyndall's feelings toward her lover are ambivalent: despite the sexual desire that she feels for him, she nevertheless will not become his wife just because society expects that she should. She tells him that she will not marry him because she "cannot be tied", but she will go away with him, and then, "when [they] do not love anymore [they] can say good-bye" (239). Significantly, here, Lyndall wants to travel inland, toward the „unknown', peripheral and unsophisticated Transvaal, which she describes as "out of the world" (239), rather than the cultural centres of "down country" (Cape

Town) or Europe. The Transvaal for her offers a potential space in which she will not have to conform to societal expectations: she and her lover can have a free sexual union and part when they no longer love or desire each other.

Lyndall and RR later do journey toward the Transvaal, but they begin to quarrel – RR tries to reach out to Lyndall but she recoils from him “as though his fingers poisoned her” and withdraws “to the other end of the room if he came to sit near her” (266). Lyndall ultimately chases RR away, but he still attempts to take care of her from a distance. For example, the landlady at one of the boarding houses Lyndall subsequently stays at receives a “letter with a cheque in it for fifty pounds” and instructions to “spend it for [Lyndall], and not to let her know” (271-272). RR writes to Lyndall asking permission to return to her: “Let me come back to you! My darling, let me put my hand around you, and guard you from the world. As my wife they shall never touch you. I have learnt to love you more wisely, more tenderly, than of old; you shall have perfect freedom” (278). Despite RR’s apparently deep love for Lyndall, she is still unable to accept his offer. In an unfinished letter she replies:

I thank you much for the love you have shown me; but I cannot listen. 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 not afraid of the world – I will fight the world. One day – perhaps it may be far off – 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, and then I shall be – (279)

This letter echoes sentiments Lyndall has expressed earlier; she seems to feel that she needs something „noble’ and „higher than herself’ to enable her to transcend her personal limitations and make a change in the world. For instance, earlier she appeals

for some kind of wisdom at Otto's grave, and cries out in distress:

Why am I so alone, so hard, so cold? I am so weary of myself! ... I cannot bear this life! I cannot breathe, I cannot live! Will nothing free me from myself? ... I want to love! I want something great and pure to lift me to itself! (241-242)

Lyndall intellectually and emotionally paralyses herself, which prevents her from fulfilling her potential and acting in the world. In another example, Waldo questions why she does not share her ideas with the world in order to effect social change, and she exclaims "I, Waldo, I? ... 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" (196). Lyndall's self-destructive actions seem to demonstrate Susan Bordo's contention that the "pathologies of female protest function, paradoxically, as if in collusion with cultural conditions that produce them, reproducing rather than transforming precisely what is being protested" (2371). Thus, it seems as though, despite her desire for action and agency, Lyndall remains trapped within the passivity associated with women.

4.2.3 Bertie

In *From Man to Man*, Schreiner further emphasises how the notions of 'pure' and 'fallen' women are social constructions through her descriptions of Bertie's transgression. Moreover, she actively aligns Bertie and Rebekah's stories in order once again to underscore the parallel between marriage and prostitution: as Monsman points out, "Bertie, indeed, has been seduced into a literal prostitution; but Rebekah, suffering through a marriage in name only, experiences in this hypocritically intimate union no less personal degradation" (151). He further contends that the "main concern

of the ensuing novel, then, is the debasement, sexual and emotional, of women – prostitution both within and without the bonds of marriage” (151). Although Rebekah desires a marriage based on love and equality, she is betrayed by her husband, Frank; not only does he have numerous affairs, but he also cannot provide her with the intellectual and emotional partnership that she desires. Bertie, on the other hand, becomes trapped as a result of her tutor’s seduction of her, and is thus unable to find the married love for which she longs, since she is, in the proverbial sense, ‘spoiled goods’.

Schreiner emphasises the bond between these two sisters as well as their shared fate from the beginning of the novel. To illustrate, on the day that Bertie is born, Rebekah asks if the baby can sleep with her for a while. After her request is initially rejected, her mother relents and allows Rebekah to hold Bertie for a while. When the Ayah comes to take the baby back to her mother, the hands of the sisters are “so interlocked, and the arm of the elder sister so closely round the younger, that she could not remove it without awakening both” (73). Since *From Man to Man* remained incomplete at Schreiner’s death, it is necessary to employ her letters that mention the novel to determine something of her intentions regarding the unfolding of the story. In a letter to Karl Pearson in 1886, for example, she wrote that she intended Rebekah to find Bertie at the end of the novel and take her into her own home to die. When reproached by Frank, who is only concerned with public appearances, Schreiner intended Rebekah to ask, “why she should not take out her dead and bury it in the sunlight – she who for 14 long years herself had been living as a prostitute (Rive, *Letters* 93). This proposed conclusion to Bertie’s life, then, further emphasises the connection between the two sisters that was initiated in the opening scene of the novel.

Berkman points out that, in the Victorian era, as “long as marriage served as women’s only safe and respectable profession, female gender training was bound to stress the life-fulfilling character of love, wedding vows and motherhood” (132). Women were not afforded the option of experience outside the private sphere of the paternal or marital home. And, in a society in which chastity was so prized, “any suspicion of premarital sexual activity would preclude a woman’s making a proper marriage or even finding respectable employment. In all of Schreiner’s major novels a „fallen woman’ suffers social ostracism and a wretched destiny: prostitution, insanity, starvation, or suicide” (Berkman 131). This is contrasted with how men are treated, both in the Victorian novel and in society. For example, in his analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth*, Watt discusses Mrs Bellingham’s response to her son’s amorous entanglement with Ruth, and suggests that her “refusal to accord any of the blame to her son for the affair with Ruth is an effective way to comment on a Victorian demand for purity on the part of women and discretion on the part of men. On discovery, the woman falls; the man is embarrassed for a while, but may move freely in society” (35). This idea is repeated in Schreiner’s *From Man to Man*. Bertie’s aunt, Mary-Anna, responds to rumours about Bertie’s relationship with her tutor, Percy Lawrie, by chasing Bertie away from her house. Mary-Anna states that “a woman’s character is like gossamer, when you’ve once dropped it in the mud and pulled it about it can never be put right again. With a man it’s different; he can live down anything” (326). Thus, although men and women are both involved in sexual transgression or impropriety, they are not held to the same standards and do not suffer the same consequences.

In many novels of the Victorian period, the sexual fall occurs „off-stage’ or outside the boundaries of the text – a discretionary tactic which perhaps further

emphasises how premarital or extramarital sex happens outside socially acceptable boundaries. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, is about the repercussions of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale's affair; the reader is only provided with descriptions of what occurs after the affair, not with information on what led to the affair or an account of the affair itself. In his discussion of Carry Brattle, in Anthony Trollope's *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, Watt suggests that Trollope's writing is significant in relating how the sexual fall alters the way society perceives the fallen woman, but emphasises how

Her despoiler remains unimportant in terms of the novel's reference. The sexual sin is deliberately distanced from the action making the fall seemingly belong to a world outside the life of the novel. Her punishment, however, is the constant subject of reference and discussion. It is very much alive though the original sin is dead. (49)

This is particularly relevant when Bertie's case in *From Man to Man* is considered. Bertie's 'fall', too, occurs outside of the text – the reader only knows that something untoward has occurred through references to her behaviour *after* Lawrie flees the farm. When her mother asks her what is wrong, Bertie does not respond: "There was in the large eyes the look that an animal has when it is in pain; the mute fear of a creature that cannot understand its own hurt" (98). Although the reader is never given direct access to the circumstances of Bertie's fall, in which her innocence is exploited by Lawrie from his relative position of power, the consequences of his violation of her are nevertheless foregrounded in the text, since she is persecuted by society and treated as a pariah. John-Ferdinand, for example, refuses to marry her after he hears of her seduction by her tutor. His attitude towards Bertie is therefore indicative of the absolutism of Victorian views of women: they are either completely pure or completely corrupt, either angel or whore. John-Ferdinand thus initially places Bertie

on an impossible pedestal and, in a conversation with Rebekah, he describes her as

the one absolutely pure and beautiful thing life has ever yet shown me. From all the world of men and women I turn to her to find in her the one absolutely spotless, Christ-like thing I have known ... For the first time I understand now how men have made a god of woman – the eternal virgin mother! (122)

When, he finds out about Bertie and Lawrie's transgression, however, his view of her changes utterly – and dramatically. Breaking off their engagement, he tells her, "it is not pain that matters, Bertie; it is sin" (136).

When Bertie leaves with Rebekah to live in Cape Town, she attends a dance and overhears women gossiping about her and Lawrie. She runs home and hides between her bed and the wall: "The old, old, terrible feeling had come back ... Something following her, following her, following her!" (236). Because she feels unable to tell her older sister what has happened, she flees Cape Town to live with her Aunt Mary-Anna in the Karoo. However, after a few months, the rumours again follow her there, and her aunt asks her to leave, claiming that "with my two girls coming home, you will understand, Bertie, that, as it is something that concerns your conduct as a young girl, I could not have you staying on here with them" (326). Bertie is subsequently left with no choice but to become the mistress of a money-lender and diamond speculator, who is referred to only as "the Jew" (328). Janet Galligani Casey points out that the reader's relationship to the text at this point is voyeuristic, and suggests that "it is Bertie's situation that most obviously places the reader in this position, for we alone witness her degradation once she has removed herself to London with the unnamed Jew who offers her bed and board in return for sexual services" (136). Ironically, when Bertie offers to work for him, he rejects her offer, saying "You are for ze joy, ze life, ze beautiful clothes, ze beautiful rings: you are not

for ze hard work!” (337). He thus forces her to comply with a situation in which she has no choice but to be his mistress – and dependant. Bertie’s descent into the status of ‚fallen woman’, then, is predicated on her relationships with men such as Lawrie and “The Jew”, both of whom exploit her sexually and bend her to their will.

Bertie’s sexual fall is highlighted by garden imagery, which echoes the archetypal fall of Eve and her subsequent exile from the Garden of Eden. For Bertie, Thorn Kloof, her home in the Karoo, becomes a place of violation, as is evident in the depiction of her garden. Her tutor, Lawrie, “often helped her to work in the flower garden” (95), and the garden is, in a sense, brought into the house when together they paint mottoes on the wall, framed with everlasting flowers. However, when Lawrie flees the farm after seducing her, Bertie destroys the flower garden, pulling the plants up by the roots and trampling the ground flat (100). In addition to this, she removes all traces of Lawrie from the house, including his music and the mottoes they had painted together.

Similarly, when Bertie lives as “The Jew’s” mistress in London, garden imagery once again features prominently in the boudoir that is created for her – for example, “the soft double-piled carpet had pink roses in it”, and into this carpet her “little stockinged feet sank noiselessly ... as into moss by the rocks in the kloof” (353). The interaction between the private domestic arena and the public space outside the private sphere is further developed through contrasting the inside of the room with the outside world. The light outside is described as “dull” and “grey”, and a “grey damp was everywhere. It seemed to ooze out of the walls of the building opposite, to ascend from the ground as much as come down from the sky” (353). Bertie looks out of the window into tiny gardens which are described as “crushed” between “high walls” (353). As she presses her face against the window to look down into these

gardens, she notes that one is littered with “a few broken flower pots” (353) – an image which seems to emphasise Bertie’s own fallen stature. When she turns back to the room, she thinks that, by contrast, “there all was beautiful” (353), but it is in fact a beautiful cage that ultimately will trap her. As Casey points out:

while Victorian mores prevented Schreiner from detailing fully the sexual nature of the couple’s exchange, she metaphorically renders the sordidness of the affair by depicting their London life in terms of sensuality turned grotesque: Bertie, provided with limitless sweetmeats and expensive clothing but prevented from leaving the house alone, becomes a fat, listless creature who spends entire days in bed and often neglects to wash or dress. (136)

In this depiction of the relationship between an individual and place, Schreiner approaches the Gothic mode that proved so evocative in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. In the latter novel, the house at Thornfield might be considered as a metaphor for Jane Eyre’s mind. The “large front chambers” (90) on the first floor (Jane’s consciousness) are contrasted with the “dark and low” (90) rooms on the third floor (Jane’s subconscious). Jane’s restless pacing up and down on the third floor is echoed by the mad woman running to and fro in the attic. Schreiner’s depiction differs from Brontë’s, however, in that Bertie herself is the “mad woman” imprisoned in a confined space. Jane Eyre’s agitated treading and Bertha’s mad shrieks and laughs in Brontë’s novel, are replaced in Schreiner’s text with Bertie’s constant weeping and extended periods of lethargy.

Of relevance here is Gilbert and Gubar’s discussion of “the ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally” (*The Mad Woman in the Attic* 53). They begin their exegesis with the notion of hysteria, often defined as a „women’s disease’, and then focus particular attention on anorexia and agoraphobia. All three of these disorders are particularly apposite to an

analysis of Schreiner's depiction of Bertie. A manifestation of the hysteria from which the latter is suffering is demonstrated through her constant weeping:

She did not know why she cried except that there was always a pressure on the top of her head and that everything was a pain to her. ... She wept so persistently that there were sometimes not six hours in the twenty-four when she was not weeping either waking or asleep. (367)

“The Jew”, her lover, eventually sends for a doctor to determine what is wrong with Bertie and, having examined her, he pronounces that “there was nothing organically wrong with her; she wanted change and excitement and overall exercise” (368). At first, she follows the doctor's orders and walks every day, but her utter isolation and loneliness is highlighted in the “strange feeling [that] used to come over her that she must go up to someone and put her hand on their arm and say, „Talk to me, please talk to me!”” (373). The narrator, however, notes that, “after a while she left off noticing the people. She took no care about her dress any more, put on anything that lay nearest and walked all the while looking down at the paving stones” (373). Eventually, she cannot be persuaded to walk at all (375). Moreover, although Bertie cannot be said to suffer from anorexia, her relationship with food is nevertheless problematic: despite the fact that initially she overindulges in confectionery, subsequently she eats less and less – but nevertheless “her face and figure grew quickly heavier” (383). The final indication of Bertie's psychosomatic disorders is the marginalisation that is represented by the “complete silence” which “seemed to have fallen on her ... unless it was quite necessary to answer some question the Jew put to her, she never spoke” (383). Her hysteria thus manifests in a variety of symptoms: her weeping, her inability to eat properly, and her muteness and immobility.

Bertie attempts to escape her fall in South Africa by travelling to London

where no one will know what has happened to her, but there she is culturally and emotionally alienated and isolated from the people and country she loves. This alienation and isolation is indicative of society's implicit reinforcement of her fallen position and restriction of her choices.

4.3 The Men behind the Fallen Women

Not only does Schreiner explore how feminine identity is constructed in a colonial context, but also the ways in which masculinity is produced. Although Schreiner parodies conventional notions of masculine identity in her presentations of Albert Blair in *Undine* and Lyndall's lover in *The Story of an African Farm*, she also problematises these notions and offers a vision of a new masculinity through the characterisation of Waldo Faber and Gregory Rose in the latter novel and Mr Drummond in *From Man to Man*.

Many of Schreiner's male characters conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity. Berkman, for example, comments that one of the stereotypes that Schreiner invokes is that of men as cold, callous oppressors. For example, in *Undine*, Albert Blair – ironically perceived by Undine to be a “piece of divine perfection” (78) – is in fact domineering and possessive. This becomes apparent when, after they have become engaged, he begins restricting and dominating her, specifically by describing her as “unwomanly”. His idea of how women should behave is distinctly Victorian:

A woman to be womanly should have nothing striking or peculiar about her; she should shun all extremes in manners and modes of expression; she should have no strong views on any question, especially when they differ from those of her surroundings; she should not be too reserved in her manners, and still less too affable and undignified. There is between all extremes a happy mediate, and there a woman should always be found. Men may turn to one

side or another; woman never must. (100-101)

He further dictates to Undine how he expects her to behave by giving her explicit instructions: “You must not spend so much time over your books as you have done. I would rather you left them alone altogether. You must give two or three hours a day to your music, and learn dancing. I want my wife to be deficient in nothing” (103). Albert places a great deal of importance on social conformity and acceptance, and thus insists that Undine attend church with him, despite her reluctance. In fact, he himself declares, “„Tis a matter of supreme indifference to me ... what you choose to believe; but you must do nothing to make yourself peculiar” (107). It is indeed difficult to understand why Undine agrees to marry a man like Albert Blair and why she denies so much of herself in order to comply with his narrow idea of the ideal woman, though she does ask herself: “Who was this man, what was he, that he should make her grovel so?” (101). A possible answer to this question may be related to Undine’s deep desire to find someone to love, and the single evening by the firelight in which Albert had seemed to her to be someone who would provide reciprocal understanding and love. On this occasion, she had told Albert of her life in Africa, and he had “sat and listened without the shade of a sneer upon his lips” (102). This moment is immediately undercut, however, by the authorial voice:

Most men have their moments of insanity, which belie and are at variance with all the days and years of the past and will find no successor in the future, moments when their thoughts and feelings are opposed to all they have ever deemed rational, right, or possible. Such moments came for the first time and the last to the Piece-of-perfection as he sat listening to Undine in the firelight.
(102)

On an impulse, nevertheless, Albert had reached out to Undine and remarked, “Your life has been lonely; no one has understood you; you may have had no one to guide

you ... Will you let me be your friend and take care of you?” (102). This single instance in which Albert reaches out, literally and figuratively, to Undine may, in part, justify her desire to marry him, since he is one of the few people in her life to offer her affection and to seem to understand her – even if only momentarily.

The characterisation of Lyndall’s lover, in *The Story of an African Farm*, in many ways replicates the portrayal of Albert Blair in *Undine*, since Lyndall’s relationship with RR seems to be based on his need for dominance and control. For example, Lyndall tells her lover:

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. (238)

She claims that the only reason RR loves her is because she initially resisted his advances and “seemed unattainable” (238), and in response to his question as to why she loves him, she replies “Because you are strong. You are the first man I ever was afraid of” (238). However, Schreiner later subverts the reader’s expectations that RR will have the upper hand in their relationship, since he agrees to Lyndall’s terms when she informs him that she will not marry him, but she will go to the Transvaal with him and allow him to look after her until they “do not love anymore” (239). Initially, he asks “my darling ... why will you not give yourself entirely to me? One day you will desert me and go to another”, but eventually he concludes, “It is better to have you on those conditions than not at all. If you *will* have it, let it be so” (239). Subsequently, however, he is transformed into a protective, fatherly figure: he addresses Lyndall as “Poor little thing! ... You are only a child” (240), and then he “lifted her gently up, and sat her on his knee ... She turned her face to his shoulder, and buried it against his

neck; he wound his strong arm about her, and held her close to him” (240). Schreiner thus complicates traditional expectations about masculine identity through her characterisation of RR as a lover-father.

Lyndall’s idea, expressed above, that men only desire women if there is a challenge to “winning”, possessing, mutilating and destroying them, is echoed in *From Man to Man* in Rebekah’s letter to Frank:

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? (293)

She then questions whether Frank had only pursued her because she initially seemed unattainable and unreceptive: “I have thought that perhaps the only woman you could have kept on loving all your life would be a woman of whom you were never quite sure, that there must be at least a flutter in the bird’s wings, a possibility in its again taking flight, to make it of value to you” (294).

In her depictions of the stereotypical Albert, RR and Frank, Schreiner thus constructs a view in which the interaction between men and women is based on dominance and possession. Berkman contrasts Schreiner’s fictional portrayals of women and men, and suggests that, although her female characters are “rich dimensioned personalities”, her male characters “fall into two classes: insensitive, domineering, possessive authorities (some attractive, others repulsive); sentimental, introspective, ineffectual dreamers (aggravating, yet lovable)” (130). She argues further that, although both in her non-fiction and correspondence, Schreiner offers male exceptions to these “two classes through her prototypes of the ‚new men’ who were to be comrades for the ‚new women’ reshaping the world” (130), she does not embody a new man in her fiction. However, although there is some truth to this

statement, it can equally be argued that Schreiner attempts to articulate her vision of the ‚new man‘ in characters such as Waldo Faber, Gregory Rose and Mr Drummond – characters who are multi-dimensional and nuanced creations.

In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner destabilises traditional notions of Victorian masculinity through her characterisation of the first two of the above three male figures. With regard to both Lyndall and Waldo, Kahane suggests that the novel addresses the question of:

What happens to a story if you take the typical features of the hero of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman – intelligence, ambition, a desire for action – and bestow them on a female character, and the features of the idealized Victorian heroine – a religious sensibility and a desire to submit self to other – and assign them to a male character? (81-82)

Many other critics similarly view the artistic, dreamy Waldo and the dominant, assertive Lyndall as inverting conventional gender categories, particularly with regard to Lyndall’s stereotypically more masculine behaviour and Waldo’s stereotypically feminine behaviour. Annalisa Oboe, for example, suggests that “Lyndall is the promise of a new kind of woman and Waldo is, unconsciously and despite his limitations, the promise of a new kind of man who listens to the woman he loves, instead of imposing his own truths” (90-91). In another instance, David Waterman suggests that Waldo “functions as a complicated representation of resistance, not only as a child against the adult world, but in terms of gender reversal, paired as he is with the more masculine Lyndall” (50).

However, the contrast between the more ‚active‘ Lyndall and the ‚passive‘ Waldo is also exemplified in their respective responses to their environment. As a young child, Lyndall desires to go to school because “nothing helps in this world ... but to be very wise, and to know everything” (45). Nevertheless, even as a child, she

recognises that books and education cannot provide the freedom for which she yearns. When she tells Em and Waldo a story about Napoleon Bonaparte, she notes that “it is only the made-up stories that end nicely”, the true ones have endings that are “terrible” and “hateful” (48). When Lyndall asks whether Waldo has read of Napoleon, he says, “Yes; but the brown history tells only what he did, not what he thought”, and she responds, “It was in the brown history that I read of him ... but I *know* what he thought. Books do not tell everything” (48). After Lyndall has related her story, Waldo claims that “What you want to know [books] never tell” and, gesturing towards the stones around him, wonders “If *they* could talk, if they could tell us now! ... then we would know something. This ‘kopje’, if it could tell us how it came here!” (48). The reference to the brown history book reminds Waldo, then, of his desire to ‘read’ the brown landscape of the Karoo as a text. He refers to another textbook, *Physical Geography*, in which he had read that the dry lands around them were once under water, and explains that it seems to him that the stones articulate a knowledge of the past. Waldo is here contrasted with Lyndall both in terms of the resonance of his relationship to the environment and to books – a contrast which highlights the reality that Lyndall cannot find meaning in the landscape, just as she cannot find meaning in her experiences and the world around her. Waldo, however, not only relates the knowledge he obtains from the books he reads to the world: “it seems to me that the stones are really speaking – speaking of the old things, of the time when the strange fishes and animals lived that are turned into stone now” (49), but also reads the landscape itself, creating a story about the bushman paintings that he sees. Lyndall cannot do this and, when Waldo questions, “Has it never seemed so to you, Lyndall?”, she answers, “No, it never seems so to me” (50).

Waldo does not only create stories, he is also a craftsman, inventor and artist

figure, and two of his projects – his sheep shearing machine and the post for Otto's grave – take nine months to complete. These projects could thus be considered as Waldo's children, once again positioning him in a female role. However, in some ways Lyndall's relationship with Waldo seems to transcend considerations of gender and sexuality. Lyndall, for example, tells him:

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. (210)

Schreiner thus offers an ideal and possibly unrealisable alternative to conventional heterosexual distinctions – an alternative in which people are not defined by their gender, but are instead conceived of as „spirits who think’.

Schreiner also subverts gender in *The Story of an African Farm* through the characterisation of Gregory Rose, whom Lyndall at one point describes as “a true woman – one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it” (197). After Gregory falls in love with Lyndall, he confides: “if I might but always be near you to serve you, I would be utterly, utterly happy. I would ask nothing in return! If you could only take everything I have and use it; I want nothing but to be of use to you” (231-232). Ultimately, he fulfils his promise to Lyndall and his own deep desire to assist her. He sets out to find her after she leaves with her lover and, upon locating her, he rides out of town towards a hill where a number of wagons are *outspanned*. He sells his horse to a “Dutchman driver” (269), walks across the *veld* to a deep gully, and jumps “down into its red bed. It was a safe place, and quiet” (270). There he questions, “Am I, am I Gregory Nazianzen Rose?” (270) and, exhausted, falls asleep in the *sloot*. This “red bed” is the womb-like site in which Gregory chooses to give birth to his new identity when he wakes: he disguises himself as a

nurse by dressing himself in an old-fashioned gown and a great pinked-out collar, and shaves off his beard – the outward sign of his masculinity. Significantly, “the little ants took [his beard] to line their nests with” (270), almost as though they are ratifying his decision to assume the appearance of a woman by using his facial hair for the “womanly” task of making a comfortable home. With regard to Gregory’s transformation, Kahane argues that “he comes to represent the text’s ideal ‘true woman’ – the elusive good mother. Gregory selflessly tracks Lyndall into the bush ... and when he finds her ill and abandoned, he literally metamorphoses from lover to nurse” (88). He thus fulfils the Victorian feminine ideal of service and submission of self to other in his nursing of Lyndall. Gregory becomes the second man to metamorphose from lover to protector. Nevertheless, the potential for a radical shift in heterosexual roles and relations here is short-lived, given that Lyndall soon dies, but Gregory follows Lyndall’s desires even after her death; in her desk he finds a letter “addressed to himself, but never posted. It held only four words: ‘You must marry Em’” (294), which he does.

It is in *From Man to Man* that Schreiner attempts more fully to depict an alternative masculinity through her portrayal of Mr Drummond. However, as mentioned earlier, since *From Man to Man* was never completed, Schreiner’s intentions for Drummond and his relationship with Rebekah are a matter for speculation. Once again, then, it is necessary to consult her letters, whilst the fragments of the novel that Cronwright edited and published of necessity provide the main source for analysis. In her letters to Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Karl Pearson, Schreiner summarised her designs for the relationship between Drummond and Rebekah. In particular, in a letter to Pearson on 9 July 1886, she describes how she intended Drummond to meet Rebekah in the middle of the story and for the two to

develop a close relationship. In this envisaged scenario, although Drummond believes that they have the right to find happiness together (they are both in unhappy marriages and, in fact, their respective spouses have an affair with each other), Rebekah is torn between love and duty to her husband. Drummond refuses to accept Rebekah's reasoning and leaves: when they meet again years later, they acknowledge their love but recognise that they cannot be together (Rive, *Letters* 91-95).

In the final analysis, however, what Schreiner *actually* wrote rather than envisaged writing provides the primary source for her characterisation of Drummond. Rebekah's first indirect brush with Drummond is through the items that she purchases from his wife, namely a statue of Hercules holding a small child and Darwin's *Variations of Plants and Animals Under Domestication*. According to Berkman, Drummond's tenderness is epitomised in the statue's "androgynous mix of male strength and gentleness" (144). Rebekah only meets Drummond in person many years later, when she attends a concert in Cape Town. Since Frank decides to remain in town, Drummond offers Rebekah a lift home, an arrangement which is interrupted when she rushes off because she thinks that she has caught a glimpse of Bertie. Frank's offhand dismissal of Rebekah's behaviour is contrasted with the more solicitous response of Drummond, who offers Rebekah any assistance he can in finding her sister. (In fact, letters reveal that Schreiner intended that Drummond would find Bertie in a brothel and return her to Rebekah).

Drummond is not only a kind and considerate man, but also a well-travelled scientist who engages with Rebekah on an intellectual level. She fantasises about inviting him into her study to show him her fossils and books. In particular, she imagines showing him his old copy of Darwin's *Variations*, with "his own notes in it, and hers written against them" (461), and arguing over "many things she'd wanted to

argue with him for years” (461). One day Drummond unexpectedly arrives to pay her a visit, and Rebekah’s son takes him into the study to wait for her. In the event, she is caught off-guard, and despite her fantasies, she reluctantly shows him only a few of her fossils – at his request, and does not share with him anything especially significant as she had imagined. After he leaves, she stands before her fossil case: “She closed it and began to pace up and down. He had been there; she had shown him nothing. All the things that she had to tell him she had not said!” (463). However, later that evening, he comes to visit her again, and they have an in-depth discussion of various philosophical ideas, such as the nature of art. When he invites her to see his fossils, she rejects his offer, and denies her own desire to engage on an intellectual and emotional level with an equal.

Maureen Ewing proposes that “Schreiner’s search for a suitable husband for her new woman ... ends without much hope. Despite this inability to find Rebekah a suitable man, Schreiner still challenges the male-female dichotomy” (49). I would argue that Ewing perhaps does not understand Schreiner’s purpose, since it is not necessary for Rebekah to marry the perfect man in order for her to find happiness. Drummond’s function in the text is not to provide Rebekah with a happily-ever-after scenario, but rather to demonstrate Schreiner’s articulation of her notion of a ‚new man’. Kate Flint points out that the “demand for a happy ending, particularly one which was based on romance, endured throughout the nineteenth century” (“The Victorian Novel and its Readers” 25). Schreiner, however, writes beyond the ending and against the grain through her subversion of the marriage plot, and her rejection of the conventional ‚happy ending’.

4.4 New Woman/New Man

It is my contention that Schreiner questions established notions of gender by adopting a number of identifiable strategies in her novels. Firstly, she highlights the contingency of the concept of a ‚sexual lapse‘ by conceiving of protagonists and scenarios that counter traditional expectations. The notion that a woman can be fallen is inextricably linked to marriage; a woman is perceived as such if she transgresses the socially sanctioned boundaries of matrimony. Schreiner emphasises that the notions of ‚pure‘ and ‚fallen‘ are thus ideologically structured along patriarchal lines emerging out of a specifically Christian context. In *Undine*, she problematises the notion of the sexual fall through her characterisation of a woman who is ‚fallen‘ despite her so-called respectable marriage because it is a loveless union into which she literally has sold herself. In *The Story of an African Farm*, by comparison, Schreiner posits that Lyndall’s decision not to marry the father of her child is ethical since she does not truly love him, and the kind of love she desires is unattainable under conditions of social and economic inequality. Finally, in *From Man to Man* Schreiner demonstrates how society creates and then victimises the fallen woman through her depiction of Bertie’s seduction by her tutor, her rejection by her sanctimonious fiancé, and her role as mistress to an unnamed “Jew” and eventual prostitution.

Schreiner is also concerned with constructions of masculinity. On the one hand, she creates domineering, chauvinistic male characters that are almost parodies of the worst characteristics of traditional Victorian men. On the other hand, she also attempts to offer a “new man” to complement her New Woman since, intrinsic to an alternative femininity, is the adoption of a different mode of masculinity.

5 The Mother

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter of this study, I examine Schreiner's subversion of the mother-figure in her fiction. Hirsch argues that, in nineteenth-century fiction, mothers are depicted as "powerful and angry to the point of madness ... or they are frustrated, trivial, inconsequential, sometimes comic" (47). She further suggests that, "Falling into neither of these categories, dead or absent mothers are, ironically, the only positive maternal figures" (47). In this chapter I have differentiated four mother types that feature prominently in Schreiner's fiction, namely the ineffectual mother, the grotesque mother, the childless mother, and the good mother. I propose that Schreiner undermines traditional Victorian notions of motherhood in order, ultimately, to posit a new kind of mother-figure embodied in the character of Rebekah. I explore the characterisation of Schreiner's mother-figures both as daughters *and* as mothers, since the "multiplicity of ‚women‘ is nowhere more obvious than for the figure of the mother, who is always both mother and daughter" (Hirsch 12). Closely related to the notion of motherhood is the idea of fatherhood, and I thus briefly interrogate Schreiner's depiction of father-figures in the closing section of the chapter.

5.2 The Ineffectual Mother

According to J.M. Coetzee, "if the pastoral writer mythologizes the earth as a mother, it is more often than not as a harsh, dry mother without curves or hollows, infertile,

unwilling to welcome her children back” (9). Similarly, in Schreiner’s novels, the earth mother is depicted as harsh and unyielding, unless bathed in moonlight.

Moreover, Schreiner’s description of the diurnal Karoo as burnt and infertile is, to some extent, echoed in her descriptions of mothers who fail to nourish and support their children.

In *Undine*, for example, although Undine has parents, it is her governess who dominates as a figure of authority when she is a young child. It is her governess who takes lessons, gives religious instruction, and metes out punishment, and she is described as a “stiff and upright individual” who “wore three curls on each side of her head and carried a large wart on the tip of her chin” (15). Her ideas “were so truly correct, feminine, and orthodox, that they might all have been placed in an ordinary breakfast saucer and left there forever, without the least fear of their ever running over” (20). The governess dominates and restricts Undine through her attempts to instil in the latter these “correct, feminine, and orthodox” notions. When Undine’s mother does feature, her role is only that of a disciplinarian. For example, the governess threatens Undine and seeks affirmation for her actions from Undine’s mother, upon which the “lady thus appealed to not only fully endorsed the opinion, but also, on hearing the nature of the offence, ordained that henceforth the offender’s seat should be in the centre of the room, beside her stepfather” (16). Later, Undine’s mother chastises her for getting stranded on a ridge whilst trying to rescue her monkey, Socrates. On this occasion, her mother – who is ironically given the appellation of “spiritual guide” (32) – describes Undine as a “wicked” and “ungodly child” (32) and sends her to bed. On one of the few times that the mother appears in the text, then, she chastises and punishes her daughter, rather than providing her with love or positive guidelines on how to be a woman in the world.

Similarly, in *From Man to Man*, it is the old Ayah who is an authority figure, rather than the “little mother”, when Rebekah is a young child. The “little mother” is only concerned with her newborn baby, Bertie; she pays no attention to its dead twin or to Rebekah herself. Moreover, although Rebekah and Bertie’s mother plays a more significant role than the mother in *Undine*, she cannot protect her children. In Rebekah’s situation, she does not provide guidance against marriage to a man who is not Rebekah’s equal and, in Bertie’s case, she does not caution or shelter her against seduction by her tutor, Percy Lawrie.

It is not only the central protagonists in Schreiner’s novels who have ineffectual mothers, however: many other characters, too, are emotionally orphaned by inadequate mothers. As Clayton argues, in *Undine*, the “contrast between the self-righteous colonial, Mrs Snappercaps, and her fat children, whom she slaps or ignores, and the deaths of Alice Brown and Undine’s children, opens up a space for the ethical investigation of the role of childbirth within and outside marriage” (*Olive Schreiner* [1997] 33). In *From Man to Man*, the inadequacies of the “little mother” are reflected in the story of Griet, “the little Bushman girl, whom Bertie had got from her drunken mother a little while before for a pair of old shoes and a bottle of wine” (*From Man to Man* 104). Schreiner thus depicts mothers that are impotent and ineffectual.

In *The Story of an African Farm* the depiction of mothers differs from that in the other two novels, because here the children (Lyndall, Waldo and Em) literally have no mother; even though Tant’ Sannie is a mother-figure of sorts, she does not fulfil the conventional role of “nurturant femininity” (Bordo 2368). In respect of Lyndall, nature may be viewed as a substitute for an absent human mother. Mazzanti suggests that the moon “seems to be Lyndall’s stepmother” (123), since from Lyndall’s first appearance she is “presented as ‘the daughter of the Moon’. She is

baptized by the moonlight in which she is immersed; and as the legitimate daughter of the Moon, she is endowed with a disquieting, supernatural beauty” (123). However, according to Mazzanti, nature “is never a merciful mother to Lyndall: it never comes to her rescue. It’s often indifferent, like the far-away, cold stars, or even hostile like the rain which drenches her as she keeps watch over the tomb of her baby” (127). Moreover, Lyndall is not provided with a positive maternal figure to emulate or to serve as an example of femininity. Adrienne Rich argues, with reference to *Jane Eyre*, that the absence of a mother and the presence of multiple maternal models in the novel provides Jane with “the freedom necessary to circumscribe her own developmental course” (Hirsch 44). However, the same cannot be said for Lyndall. Lyndall is not only motherless but also lacks *any* alternative or viable mother surrogate, and this shortfall arguably leads to her inability to mature into an emotionally fulfilled, individuated adult, secure in the choices she makes with regard to her feminine identity.

5.3 The Grotesque Mother

Schreiner’s ineffectual mothers obviously deviate from normative feminine roles, but those women characters in her novels who seem on the surface to comply with society-sanctioned roles may also be construed as tacitly challenging convention. Showalter contends, for example, that, in Schreiner’s fiction, “the quintessential female role is frequently associated with a grotesque obesity, like pregnancy or dropsy ... Reduced to their sexual functions, women in [her] novels seem monstrous, swollen, and destructive” (*A Literature of Their Own* 196). Schreiner’s use of the grotesque in her constructions of feminine identity is complicated, however. At times, the

grotesque is tempered with humour, as is demonstrated in *The Story of an African Farm*, in which Tant' Sannie's is something of a caricature. By contrast, Lyndall is treated with pathos and pity. Similarly, in *Undine*, Margaret's descent into madness after the death of Undine's brother, Frank, is portrayed tragically. In this subsection, I begin by discussing Schreiner's characterisation of Tant' Sannie, examining in particular her voracious appetite for men and how this is linked to her desire for power. I then elucidate Lyndall's resistance to the power structures which create the „woman as parasite', a resistance which nevertheless results in her wasting away. Finally, I expound Margaret's madness symptomatically as a hysterical response to a patriarchal society.

The opening scene of *The Story of an African Farm*, reveals a monstrous parasite in the figure of Tant' Sannie. In her seminal text, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed discusses her term “monstrous feminine”, and argues that “As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality” (3). In Schreiner's depiction of the monstrous Tant' Sannie, then, her grotesque nature is intimately linked to her femaleness. She lies in bed, and dreams

Not of the ghosts and devils that so haunted her waking thoughts; nor of her second husband, the consumptive Englishman, whose grave lay beyond the ostrich-camps; nor of her first, the young Boer; but only of the sheep's trotters she had eaten for supper that night. She dreamed that one stuck fast in her throat, and she rolled her huge form from side to side, and snorted horribly. (35-36)

This dream – in which Tant' Sannie dreams of sheep trotters or food, rather than of her husbands and sex – prefigures a later oneiric episode, in which she dreams of killing a “great beast like a sheep, with red eyes” (201). She interprets the latter dream to mean that she will marry a distant relative who comes to visit, Piet van der Walt:

“Wasn’t the white wool his hair, and the red eyes his weak eyes, and my killing him meant marriage” (201). Tant’ Sannie, then, in her literal and figurative consumption of men, is like the parasites that Schreiner discusses in *Woman and Labour*, since she uses marriage as a means of gaining power and influence. In contrast to an emphasis on Tant’ Sannie’s voracious femininity, however, Waterman suggests that Tant’ Sannie “represents patriarchal power on the farm”, and that she is depicted as an “adult male in a system of power which disempowers children and women” (45); a role reversal that succeeds only because she “*supports* the patriarchal system” (46). Waterman views Tant’ Sannie as masculinised, in relation to her physique, her violent tendencies, and her relationship with her third husband – in which, “since she has already assumed the dominant, masculine role, her husband is assigned the stereotypically feminine, submissive counterpart” (46). Tant’ Sannie’s philosophy of „love’ is encapsulated in her declaration that “marriage is the finest thing in the world. I’ve been at it three times, and if it pleases God to take this husband from me I should have another” (293). She becomes the matriarch of a new farm and family, and tells Em that there is “nothing like being married ... If a woman’s got a baby and a husband she’s got the best things the Lord can give her” (293). She further claims, “As for the husband, it’s very much the same who one has. Some men are fat, and some men are thin; some drink brandy and some drink gin; but it all comes to the same thing in the end; it’s all one. A man’s a man, you know” (293). Although Tant’ Sannie is the dominant authority figure in her new marriage, as she is on the farm, her power ultimately derives from her ability to procure a husband – a feminine strategy, despite her masculine qualities.

Hirsch posits a binary in which monstrous mothers are opposed to comic, ineffectual mothers. In *The Story of an African Farm*, however, Schreiner depicts a

mother-figure who is both monstrous and comic, although the humour derives from her grotesque attributes. Hirsch's comic mothers have no power, but Tant' Sannie is an active and powerful matriarch. Significantly, however, although Tant' Sannie has power over Em, who subscribes to a conventional femininity, she does not have power over Lyndall, who rejects such a role. This can be demonstrated through Tant' Sannie's attempt to dominate the children physically. After Bonaparte manipulates Tant' Sannie into firing Otto, Lyndall and Em are heartbroken. They are forbidden from seeing Otto, and the two girls enter the house. Tant' Sannie then "waddled after them, and caught Em by the arm. She had struck Lyndall once years before, and had never done so again; so she took Em" (91). Tant' Sannie's attempt to hit Em is thwarted by Lyndall, who averts the beating not by employing physical strength, but with "her clear eyes":

For one instant Lyndall looked on, then she laid her small fingers on the Boer woman's arm. With the exertion of half its strength Tant' Sannie might have flung the girl back upon the stones. It was not the power of the slight fingers, tightly though they clenched her broad wrist ... but the Boer-woman looked into the clear eyes and at the quivering white lips, and with a half-surprised curse relaxed her hold. (91)

Lyndall's ability to resist the authority of Tant' Sannie stems from her rejection of the feminine role and its associated connotations of obedience, compliance and passivity. However, she is not completely able to resist Tant' Sannie's oppression, as subsequently the two girls are locked in their bedroom to prevent them from going to Otto. Lyndall continues to attempt to defy authority, however, through her futile efforts to break out of their prison, which eventually culminate in an attempt to burn down the house. Although she does not succeed, she asserts that, "When that day comes, and I am strong, I will hate everything that has power, and help everything

that is weak” (93).

Nevertheless, there is no place for the kind of woman that Lyndall wishes to be in the society in which she finds herself, and she ultimately wastes away into nothingness. In a conversation with Waldo, Lyndall articulates how society confines people within narrow boundaries: to men the world says “*Work*” and to women the world says “*Seem*” (188), and men can work to gain “all that the human heart desires” (188) but, for women, strength, knowledge and labour cannot help them. Although it is possible for women to “gain what men gain”, they achieve such things “by other means” (188). She explains how nothing would accomplish as much for her as her “little chin” – the beauty with which she can win money, love, power, and fame (188). She explains how, if she and Waldo were to approach a farm alone one night, they would be treated very differently. In Waldo’s case, even if he arrives “alone and on foot”, the farmer would give him “a pipe of tobacco and a cup of coffee and a bed” and, if he had no work for Waldo, he would be sent on his way with a “friendly greeting of the hand” (190). In Lyndall’s case, by contrast, if she arrived at the same farm she would be greeted with strange questions and strange glances. Despite this gendered disparity, Lyndall claims that women do have a slight advantage over men:

we can at any time step into ease and competence, where [men] must labour patiently for it. A little weeping, a little wheedling, a little self-degradation, a little careful use of our advantages, and then some man will say – “Come, be my wife!” With good looks and youth marriage is easy to attain. (190)

Lyndall, however, refuses to follow this route. But if Tant’ Sannie, who accepts the role that society offers women, becomes a bloated parasite consuming men, Lyndall represents the idea that women who do not comply will ultimately become debilitated. However, the latter outcome is no less grotesque than Tant’ Sannie’s monstrous,

swollen state. Mazzanti, for example, employs Annis Pratt's study of the archetypal figures in women's fiction, specifically the idea of 'growing up grotesque', to analyse Lyndall's decline. Applying Pratt's argument, Mazzanti shows that, in this pattern of development, the heroine "follows a feminine, ironic version of the *Bildungsroman*'s traditional path to maturity: that is, she grows up deformed and immature instead of developing into an adult being" (126). She argues further that "in the cultural, physical, erotic and professional aspects of her life as a woman, she comes upon limits and barriers which force her to squeeze into narrow and suffocating corners" (126). Lyndall herself directly expresses this idea when she describes the finishing school she attends: "I have seen some souls so compressed that they would have fitted into a small thimble, and found room to move there – wide room" (185). Ironically, however, she herself ultimately falls victim to a state of emaciated impotence.

The final example of grotesque motherhood that will be discussed here is that of Aunt Margaret – Undine's future sister-in-law, and surrogate mother-figure. Margaret initially appears as the epitome of the perfect "Angel in the House", but the death of Undine's brother, Frank – Margaret's betrothed, results in her descent into madness and monstrosity. The first time that "Golden Light" (36), as Margaret is nicknamed by Frank, is introduced, she is described in angelic terms: she is doing needlework with Undine in the rose garden while Frank sits besides the two, showering rose petals over Margaret's golden hair and white dress (33). The deeply religious Margaret provides a motherly and supportive role for Undine, giving her spiritual as well as emotional guidance. In a conversation with Undine, Margaret pointedly comments, "if someone whom I loved very much were to die not loving Christ, I think – I am sure, I should go mad, quite mad" (37). This prefigures the drastic change that affects Margaret after Frank's drowning. She disappears

immediately after Frank's death, and is subsequently discovered by Undine:

There, with the sunlight streaming over its yellow hair, crouched a naked human figure. The knees were drawn up till the chin rested on them, and one arm was clasped tight around them; the other was stretched out, and one finger pointed to a crack in the boards. The eyebrows were drawn down till the eyes were hardly visible, but they opened slightly every time the mouth twitched nervously to one side or the other. Undine stood motionlessly in the doorway and watched it. Had sorrow touched her reason? Was she mad? Or was that really what she looked for – that thing with the faded yellow flowers in its hair? (62)

Margaret points at a crack in the wall, where she counts the demons that she thinks have come for Frank's soul:

Ha-ha-ha! There they come – one, two, three; there they come – the devils that have got his soul, hundreds of them, thousands of them. That is the door they took him down, there. I asked God to take me instead, but He would not, and now they have got me too. He used to say there was no God, and no hell, but God will show him now. Ha-ha-ha! How they come! Little devils – one, two, three! (62)

In her madness, she does not recognise Undine, but thinks that she is the devil and, transforming into something like a vampiric monster, she bites Undine. When those who have heard the screams and laughs enter the room, “Undine lay upon the floor insensible, and in the far corner crouched a thing that licked its red lips and cried exultingly as it pointed at her: ‚I have killed the devil! I have killed the devil! Ha-ha-ha!’” (63). In this attack on Undine, Margaret symbolically links her fiancé's atheism to his sister's religious uncertainty. She is subsequently removed from society into “a dark strong house far off where a mad woman grew wilder still if they showed her a Bible or a yellow flower” (63) – the yellow flowers remind Margaret of Frank, who often sprinkled these flowers in her hair. Thus, one of the few positive maternal figures that Schreiner initially provides for Undine loses her mind.

5.4 The Childless Mother

Despite their brief experience of biological motherhood, I would argue that Undine and Lyndall can not really be considered as mothers at all, but rather as childless mothers. Firstly, both of their infants die soon after birth; secondly, they do not consider themselves as mothers to their children. Hirsch analyses how mothers have been perceived in literary terms, and highlights how the “active, angry rebellious woman cannot be a mother; the mother can be neither active nor rebellious” (38). This is a possible explanation for the rejection of motherhood that Schreiner depicts amongst certain of her fictional characters. For example, Undine views her daughter Violet as her *friend* rather than her *child*, and Lyndall, too, does not behave as a mother to her child. Their rejections of conventional mother-child relations, then, can be seen as a function of their desire for a new way of being in society.

Showalter argues that, although it was technically possible for nineteenth-century women novelists to write about “female physical experience”, in reality they “were taught to keep these experiences to themselves” (*A Literature of Their Own* 81). In light of this assertion, Helen Bradford offers a compelling argument in relation to the ambiguous and cryptic inflections of certain words and phrases – for contemporary readers, at least – in Schreiner’s narratives:

Her texts reveal new stories if subjected to questions about the historical meaning of words on the page – and to insights derived from feminism. Talk about intimate matters was often coded; words frequently had sexual allusions as well as everyday connotations; her narratives are saturated with a historically- and gender-specific network of double meanings. (624)

Bradford argues that, if the coded language that Victorian women writers used is deciphered, Schreiner can be seen to be presenting women characters who confront

the dilemmas and experience of abortion. She highlights the possibility that this theme in Schreiner's fiction may have been ignored by historians and literary critics, since this covert language is "less transparent to us than it was to [Schreiner]" (624). If, during the Victorian period, women authors "engaged in double-talk, in speaking of the unspeakable in a symbolic domain" (630), then it can be demonstrated that "Schreiner both hid and revealed numerous stories about abortion in her texts" (624). In *Undine*, for example, Bradford maintains that "abortion flickers insistently across the reader's vision ... provided she or he is familiar with Victorian vocabularies, Victorian literature" (632). She argues further that, "at the heart of *Undine*'s submerged plot centred on maternity, is seemingly a woman mourning her moment of madness in which she lost the child of the man she adores" (632-633).

The relationship that Undine has with the baby she carries to full term is complex to say the least. When she first finds out that she is pregnant, she is desperately unhappy. For Undine, as previously indicated, her child is "not the child of love, but of loathing" (134). After the baby is born, Undine initially wants nothing to do with it and, when the baby is laid next to her, she cries out, "take it away" (142). She asks anguishedly,

Why would they always bring that thing into her sight and keep it near her? Was it not enough that its little weak cry had rung loud in her ears when she was insensible to every other sound and had made her lose all love of life, all wish to keep it, even more than the kisses of its father had done. (142)

Undine's hatred for her husband, George, leads her to hate the baby. She looks at the child, and thinks that it "was strange to know its life had sprung from hers", but then moves on to deliberate: "What were they all, really – that little life – the purple violets – the dark-green curtains – herself lying and thinking? Were they all nothing, dreams,

shadows? Or something? And, if something, O God! What?" (143). She stoops down over the baby girl and says, "Poor little soul ... life is too wonderful to hate in. Poor little soul, we are all too nearly bound for hating" (143). Undine then decides to name her baby Violet and, when her husband enters the room, he is surprised to see her holding their child with a bunch of violets in its hand. From this point on, there is a change in Undine. She has a smile "so bright and unlike her own" that her husband fears she may be dying, but "after that day he often saw it, and others saw it also. The very servants whispered that their mistress had changed strangely; and surely it was the coming of the baby that had changed her" (143-144). Undine takes the baby out with her out to the great trees on the lawn; and, significantly, "she read in those still, sweet days; and books, which to her had so long been meaningless and dumb, had again voice and life" (144). She has realised that "life is too wonderful to hate in" (143), and thus decides to embrace maternity and the baby she has neglected.

Undine describes her baby as her "little friend" and tells her "of things which could not have been spoken in any other ear" (144), but does not notice that the child, which was never very strong, is dying. Although her husband and servants are too afraid to tell her that her baby is ill, eventually the doctor informs her of the truth.

Undine's response reflects her new-found acceptance of life:

is it always to be so? Are we only to lift our heads above the water to be pushed down again? Do we only rise up because, if we did not, we could not be flung down to earth? Is light only sent to make the darkness visible? ... My little friend, I am very cruel to wish to keep you. Would life have more of happiness for you than it has had for me? – a little gladness out of colours and lights; a little sweetness out of dreams; one hour of bliss looking at footprints in the white snow? Is that enough to make it worth keeping? Oh, my little friend, it will be better to go. You have made a little brightness. There is nothing better waiting for you if you stay. (145)

Undine's baby offers her a period of short-lived happiness in a life that has been filled with tragedy, but she is not possessive and protective in a conventional sense, and George wonders at Undine's calmness when she tells him of Violet's death. The authorial voice provides a clue to her apparent equanimity:

how could he understand the love she bore her child, the passionless love, loving it in spite of its being hers? The baby I love, because it is mine; the woman I cling to against my reason – I must hear them, see them, touch them, or be devoured by a senseless gnawing; but the friend whose soul has reached mine, the thing I have loved for what it taught me, I let them pass without a tear, for my part of them remains with me, and for the rest, let it go. (147)

Undine loves the infant not because it is *her* child, but rather because it provides her with a source of love and friendship. Thus, she cannot really be considered as a ‚true‘ mother, since she does not love her child unconditionally *because* it is her child – as motherhood is conventionally constructed – but rather loves her child *in spite* of its being her genetic offspring.

In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner again offers a mother-figure who cannot really be considered an orthodox mother – Lyndall. In a conversation with Waldo, Lyndall remarks that “it must be a terrible thing to bring a human being into the world” (209) and then states, “I have no conscience, none ... but I would not like to bring a soul into this world. When it sinned and when it suffered something like a dead hand would fall on me, – „You did it, for your own pleasure you created this thing! See your work!’ If I lived to be eighty it would always hang like a millstone around my neck” (209). Lyndall's reluctance to embrace the responsibility of child-rearing ensures that the ‚abortion motif‘ of *Undine* is carried through in *The Story of an African Farm*. Bradford, for example, comments that Lyndall is unsure of what to do when she first realises that she is pregnant, and her hesitation is “symbolized by

her fretfully taking her lover's ring on and off – and spelt out as she constantly changes her mind” (634). Subsequently, Lyndall “embark[s] on action all too recognizable to Victorian women. Having demanded that the buggy be mended, and that she be taught to drive it, she is riding in it continuously, alone, with very wild horses” (635). This attempt to miscarry does not succeed, however: Lyndall bears her child, but the baby dies soon after birth. Although she does not once kiss her child, she later regrets that it was never shown affection:

It was so small ... They laid it close by me, but I never saw it; I could feel it by me ... Its feet were so cold; I took them in my hands to make them warm, and my hand closed right over them they were so little ... It crept close to me; it wanted to drink, it wanted to be warm ... I did not love it; its father was not my prince; I did not care for it; but it was so little. ... They might have kissed it, one of them, before they put it in. It never did anyone any harm in all its little life. They might have kissed it, one of them. (278)

Lyndall's response to her child is ambiguous and conflicted: it is a child that she does not want from a man that she does not love, but she nevertheless mourns its loss: indeed, her sense of bereavement results in her death, since she remains at the baby's grave in the rain, and in her weakened state catches a fatal chill. Similarly to Undine, who initially does not love her child because she hates its father, Lyndall claims that she does not love her baby since its father was not her “prince”. Her feelings, however, are contradictory. She talks to the dead child, from her room, remarking on “How terrible [it is] when the rain falls down on you”, and asks Gregory to cover the grave with her cloak (277). In addition to this, she differs from Undine in the sense that, in a way, she *does* love the father of her baby. In a letter to him, she writes: “I will always love you for the sake of what lay by me those three hours” (279). Mazzanti proposes that Lyndall in essence remains a spinster, despite her maternity (127), and argues that she is “Portrayed as a mother who is not able to accept her own

child, because she considers it as the embodiment of her oppression as a woman in a patriarchal society” (127-128). Nevertheless, she is not entirely indifferent to the child – or to the man who was its father.

Bertie in *From Man to Man* is completely different to the childless mothers of Schreiner’s earlier novels, since she *wants* to be a mother but this desire is never fulfilled. As she slowly falls into a deep depression in London, she temporarily considers setting up a home for street children. She claims that she could do this for thirty pounds (365), but she does nothing more than think about how she would go about setting up the home, rather than realising any of her plans. In an attempt to rouse her from her depression and lethargy, the servant Isaac suggests to “The Jew” that, if they were to obtain some cats for Bertie as pets, she might regain her desire to live. He buys three kittens for Bertie, but her response to them emphasises her loneliness, and her desire for children and a nursery:

She bought three exquisite little china bowls, decorated, one with a rose, one with holly and one with larkspur. She bought three rolls of ribbon exactly to match the flowers on each bowl and three tiny real silver bells. When she got home she tied on each its bell with ribbon to match its bowl and gave each one the name of the flower on its bowl, Holly, Larkspur, and Rose. (384-385)

She initially puts the kittens in a basket, but later orders a cradle to be specially made: “It was of white wood, in three little compartments, all joined together and on rockers, with three little hoods, one over each compartment” (385). She spends three days lining and draping the cradle, and then makes three silk bags which she hangs in the drawing-room fireplace, each containing a silk handkerchief embroidered with a kitten’s name and used to wipe its mouth after it has drunk milk. In addition, she “fed them with tiny morsels of chicken held between her lips” (386). After three weeks, however, she

dropped back into the old life; she still fed them three times a day, but generally she put the food all in one bowl; their ribbons were unchanged for three or four days; they slept in any compartment of the cradle, and she never took them down to dinner; they went if they chose. (386)

Despite the initial success of Isaac's plan, Bertie nevertheless falls back into depression.

Bertie is the only truly childless mother in Schreiner's novels, yet all she longs for is a fulfilling life as a wife and mother. She tells Rebekah, "It must be so nice to get married" (88), but follows this thought with an expression of her desire to stay near her parental home, revealing how Bertie has been infantilised (as demonstrated by her nick-name "Baby-Bertie"). Indeed, like the kittens, she is later treated as an ornament herself. Undine and Lyndall, on the other hand, are not conventional mother-figures, though they do, briefly, have children. Undine does not behave as a mother to her child, Violet, but rather views her as a friend and confidante, and Lyndall feels that bringing a child into the world is sinful.

5.5 The Good Mother

Rebekah in *From Man to Man* is one of the few portraits of a good mother in Schreiner's fiction; however, her role as mother comes into conflict with the other roles that she wishes to fulfil, in particular, the role of writer. Hirsch suggests that in Victorian ideology, motherhood "represents a confinement and potential destruction impossible to combine with the freedom and expansiveness seen as necessary to artistic creativity" (45). Rebekah's maternal responsibilities thus inevitably impact on her writing and intellectual pursuits. Nevertheless, Schreiner's depiction here of a

woman balancing the roles of mother and writer centres on Rebekah's private study as a locus of creative freedom, and this space may be viewed as an early manifestation of Woolf's famous notion of the women writer's need for "A Room of One's Own". Moreover, Rebekah's incorporation of story-telling into her motherly duties emerges as both a traditionally and potentially innovative way of combining motherhood and writing.

Rebekah's study has been interpreted as seminal to Schreiner's articulation of the dilemma of the woman writer who is also a mother, though not all critics necessarily view this room as signifying empowerment. Showalter, for example, describes Rebekah's private study as "the novel's most potent and disturbing symbol" (*A Literature of Their Own* 202), and suggests that the room is "all too clearly and pathetically the embodiment of her femaleness; it is connected to the children and Nature, and linked to the evolutionary past, literally a womb with a view" (202). While there is no doubt value in Showalter's assertion, the room is nevertheless significant because it is Rebekah's own private space – a place that Frank is forbidden from entering. Furthermore, it is important that the room is connected with nature and children: in her depiction of Rebekah, Schreiner attempts to express fictionally the struggles of a woman who is reader, writer *and* mother. Rebekah uses this room, then, as "a study for herself where she could always hear the children call if they needed her at night" (*From Man to Man* 171), and it is here that she writes in her diary and "scribbles" down her philosophical and socio-political ideas. She leads a lonely life, both intellectually and emotionally, and frequently dreams of viewing great art or music, or of being part of a group of men and women "in a room together, all sharing somewhat the same outlook on life and therefore thinking somewhat the same thought, and able to understand one another without explanation" (174). Despite

lacking these cultural and philosophical diversions, however, she finds comfort and company in the books that she has been collecting since a child:

From her shelves, the bindings of her books looked down at her, each one a little brown face that seemed to love her. Behind each was hidden the mind of some human creature which at some time had touched her own; they were all the intellectual intercourse she had ever known. Not one was there because it was a rare or old copy, or had expensive binding; each one was there because at some time she had lived close to it and it had penetrated her. (175)

Although she often does not have time to spend time in her study, it is enough for her to know that it is there, “and there was always a quiet spot in her mind answering to it” (175). Rebekah never relinquishes her role as wife and mother, however: at one point her aching pregnant body asserts itself as she mends and darns clothing, before beginning an evening of reading and writing. On another occasion, she opens her latest diary for the first time in four months: “When last she wrote she had been sitting up for a night, to make poultices for her boy, who had bad earache, and, between whiles as he slept, she had written” (177). The narrator then provides a detailed outline of the thoughts and arguments Rebekah had developed, punctuated every so often by interruptions necessitated by her caring for her son.

Rebekah’s diaries provide a fascinating perspective on the increased emphasis placed on the private writings of women in the nineteenth century. Michelle Adler has focused on the new insights gained from analysing the letters, journals and travelogues of nineteenth-century South African women colonials, in particular, pointing out that these documents are important sources of “everyday testimony” because “they reveal the individual consciousness, its ‘structures of feeling’, and the lines of identity by which a woman’s new place and world are imagined” (89).

Furthermore, the gendered nature of such writings enables an exploration of how

“relations of gender are perpetuated, exploited or transformed in a specific colonial context, and to what extent women accepted, colluded with, or resisted their marginal and subordinate status” (95). Adler points out that an analysis of diaries, for example, reveals how “Discourses of domesticity characterized most female writing of the era and reflected the gender constraints of Victorian society, notably the way in which middle-class women’s lives and writings were circumscribed and defined by the „women’s’ sphere of home and hearth” (83). An examination of the diaries that Schreiner inserts into her fiction – though at one remove from authentic archival material – provides insight into the debates that have been opened up through analyses of private colonial papers.

Significantly the changes in Rebekah’s diaries – from girl to woman to wife and mother – reflect a shift from earnest literary and philosophical aspirations to domestic practicalities. The diaries that she wrote as a child are filled with verses and short stories, allegories told in rhyme, and a story as “long as a novel, and quite finished”, written in “the sharply pointed writings of a very small child who tries to write a flowing hand” (*From Man to Man* 176). The diaries that she wrote as a young girl “also held stories, but few had verses; and there were discussions on abstract questions” in a “larger, more rounded hand” (176). One diary, in particular, was filled with “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” (176). After Rebekah has married, however, although some books are filled, “the entries dwindled. Months passed in which nothing was written” (176). Occasionally, particularly after a child had been born and “it had been necessary to lie still for weeks, there were dissertations on some abstract matter, or an allegory; but generally there were only short scraps; outlines of stories never to be filled in” (176). Eventually

there are only practical entries relating to weaning children, hiring servants, or notes about planting seeds, with occasional coded references to her husband's affairs (176). The changes in the content of Rebekah's diaries, then, reflect how her role as wife and mother has affected her literary and intellectual pursuits, and circumscribed her spheres of experience. The poetry and creative writing that filled the diary of the child are replaced with the hopes of a life of travel and knowledge. Finally, the occasional discussion of abstract ideas is replaced with information relating to Rebekah's role as wife and mother in the private sphere of the household.

Rebekah's role as mother does not always conflict with her role as writer, or rather as storyteller, however. Berkman suggests that, although "Rebekah can never act on her childhood utopian fantasy of motherhood, she does deviate somewhat from conventional parental practices when she actually becomes a mother" by, for example, using "stories to instil countercultural values in her children" (148). One particular instance in which Rebekah employs stories to teach her children emerges in her chastisement of her sons for their treatment of Sartje, the child she has adopted who is the offspring of her husband's affair with their maid. Rebekah firmly rebukes her own children for their dismissive treatment of Sartje, and remarks: "when I hear people talking of superior races and inferior peoples, and of keeping other races and peoples down, I hardly understand" (438). She further admonishes her children by sharing one of her own allegorical stories and then addressing the following heartfelt wish to them:

I hope, I believe, I know, the day will come when you will regret utterly every slighting, every unkind word or act, that you have ever given place to towards Sartje, and when you will be deeply grateful for every kind or generous thing you have done towards her. Sartje is not a black child any more than she is pure white. It is not her fault that she is not white, any more than it is your virtue that you are not half-black. Sartje is alone in the world. Her mother

does not want her; her father does not know that he even has such a daughter in the world. She has no one but us to take care of her.

(439)

On the one hand, this act of healing and recognition may serve as a means of redemption for Rebekah, if not for Frank, who is unaware that Sartje is his daughter. Voss, for example, suggests that “one of the profound re-constitutive gestures of the novel is Rebekah’s assumption of Sartje, the issue of her husband’s infidelity with a coloured housemaid, into her family” (144). In other words, through this adoption of Sartje, Schreiner offers a vision in microcosm of how reconciliation might be achieved in a racially-divided South Africa. On the other hand, however, this act is ambiguous, since Sartje is told to refer to Rebekah as “mistress”, and is thus positioned within the master-servant relationship. Sartje, too, does not know that Frank is her father and that Rebekah’s children are therefore her half-brothers. Rebekah’s adoption of Sartje may thus be seen as an act of domination, in which a white woman dispossesses a black woman of her child. Nevertheless, Sartje’s inclusion in Rebekah’s family means that Rebekah has to some extent attempted to address the wrongs that have been done to the child, and to provide her with love and a family.

Significantly, even as a young child, Rebekah acts as a „surrogate’ mother. On the day that her younger sister, Bertie, is born, Rebekah enters the spare room: “It was her favourite place, to which she went whenever she wanted to be quite safe and alone” (38). As she walks to the bed under which she keeps a box filled with “specially prized play things” (38), she discovers Bertie’s dead twin, which has been laid on a large table in the centre of the room. Unaware that the infant is dead, she spontaneously decides to give the baby some of her most treasured items: “the

alphabet book, the Bushman stone, the silver thimble and a paper of needles, Queen Victoria's head, and a stick of chocolate" (40), and then falls asleep next to it. She is woken by the Ayah, whom she asks to stop shouting else she will wake the baby. She does not understand how children are born, and claims that the baby is hers since she found it, just as "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!" (42). She later fantasises about having a baby of her own, one she finds in a "snow-white pod, nearly as long as her arm. It was like a pea pod, but it was covered all over with a white, frosted silver" (47). Upon breaking open the pod, she discovers a naked, pink baby, in size in proportion to her, just as adult women's babies are in proportion to them when they first find their children. She tries to lift the baby out, "but it was tied to the pod like mimosa seeds are, with a little curled-up string" (47). She then carries the baby home with her, and tells it the most elaborate stories. This episode significantly prefigures two important characteristics that Rebekah displays as an adult – firstly, the nurturing impulse she evinces in becoming a surrogate mother to Sartje, Frank's illegitimate daughter, and secondly, her tendency to use stories to teach her children.

Rebekah is a complex, nuanced character, and it is thus somewhat problematic to suggest that she is Schreiner's representation of a positive female and maternal role model, since the way in which she is depicted is often undermined. Showalter, for example, argues that "Rebekah is a particularly convincing portrait of the woman who is not so much trapped as self-imprisoned" (*A Literature of Their Own* 202).

Nevertheless, her complex characterisation highlights the difficulty that the women who wish to juggle various roles – maternal, readerly, writerly – experienced, especially at the turn of the century. Moreover, the ambiguity of Rebekah's study, in particular, highlights the tension she experiences between such roles, and her effort to

achieve some form of balance and compromise.

5.6 Father-Figures

Closely related to a discussion of the depiction of different kinds of mother in Schreiner's fiction is her representation of father-figures. Hirsch argues that, traditionally, stories are dependent on "male intervention to occasion the narrative" (6). Schreiner's works, on the other hand, emphasise either the *absence* of fathers or the insignificance of the father-figures that do appear.

In *Undine*, for example, the protagonist's biological father is entirely absent from the narrative. While still in South Africa, Undine has a father-figure in the form of a stepfather, but it is made explicit that she is indifferent to him and that he does not feature as a significant presence in her life. For example, as punishment for being late for Sunday prayers, she is made to sit next to her stepfather:

This was intended as a direful chastisement, but the child's thoughts were still occupied ... and she would have cared nothing just then if they had sentenced her to sit next [to] some savage king of Timbuctoo who makes his meals of little girls. (16)

When Undine moves to England, the stepfather she ignores is replaced by her formidable, Calvinist grandfather, with whom she comes into serious conflict over her sense of the hypocrisy of the church and her refusal to attend religious meetings. Her grandfather is described as a "dried hide", with "cold eyes" and a "leathery, intonationless voice" (49) that fills Undine with fear. He does not accept Undine's reasons for not wanting to go to church, and humiliates her: "Be silent ... Little children who act in this manner should be whipped and taught how to behave themselves" (49). After initially complying with her grandfather's wishes, however, Undine adamantly refuses to attend church services, claiming that "people who love

Christ should keep away from such places ... If He came to earth to-day He would denounce them as He did the Pharisees and priests in His day. It's all a mockery and an empty show" (55). Although Undine wins this particular battle, she nevertheless feels heartbroken and alienated from those who should love her.

After the death of her brother, Undine is taken in by her cousin Jonathan, who proves to be a destructive father-surrogate. Initially, he was "good to her, did all in his power for her, but she liked him less as the years went on" (66). Moreover, "the intellectual help which he had been able to give her ceased to be a bond between them when she had reached his ground and even passed beyond him" (66). Undine's growing rejection of Jonathan turns into disgust as his sexually predatory feelings towards her become increasingly apparent. One day in particular, he questions why she does not confide in him as she once did. His interrogation is accompanied by his playing with her hair, an action which inspires "a feeling of disgust ... as it had often done lately when he kissed or caressed his little daughter, as he called her" (67). Jonathan's desire for Undine is intensified by the fact that she is indifferent to him and unattainable:

The little man felt ... as though he could have killed her, for he knew that she would never love him. She hung as far from his reach as the rose that hangs on the topmost branch of a bush is from the worm that creeps up and down on the rotten leaves below. He hated her, and yet he loved her with a love that had grown with her opening beauty and her softening figure. (70-71)

When he eventually openly admits his feelings for Undine and makes overtly sexual overtures, she is outraged. She "threw him from her" and, "Even in the dim firelight, the look of intense loathing [her face] wore was visible" (95). Jonathan's most pernicious intervention in Undine's affairs occurs when, out of bitterness and revenge, he lies to Albert about her – a slanderous act which leads Albert to break off their

engagement. Jonathan untruthfully informs Albert that Undine's mother was "some woman" her father had "picked up in London" (119) when, in reality, her mother had been "the only daughter of a wealthy London merchant and had been disinherited for marrying beneath her" (119). Despite the fact that Undine never experienced any romantic feelings towards Albert's brother, Jonathan insinuates that she did, and claims that he is worried that she may have "been tempted for the sake of wealth and position to give herself away to a man who was utterly unworthy of her" (118). Jonathan's underhand remarks cunningly conceal his dishonourable intentions, as the narrator highlights with the comment: "If you wish to ruin a man's character, if you wish to have your revenge on an enemy, if you wish to blight a man's life because you have done him an injury, be sparing with your words. It is the small drop that falls in between the wine and sugar that poisons the cup" (120).

In *The Story of an African Farm*, the novel opens with the significant absence of a father – in this case, Em's father, who has died before the narrative commences. He leaves two important legacies after his death, however. The first is the miserliness of his widow, Tant' Sannie, who is his second wife and not Em's mother. In this regard, Lyndall tells Em:

Tant' Sannie is a miserable old woman ... Your father married her when he was dying, because he thought she would take better care of the farm, and us, than an Englishwoman. He said we should be taught and sent to school. Now she saves every farthing for herself, buys us not even one old book. She does not ill-use us – why? Because she is afraid of your father's ghost. (45)

His second legacy is his extensive book collection, that remains hidden in the attic and later provides the children with access to the intellectual heritage that he felt so important.

After the death of Em's father, Otto becomes a spiritual father to the children.

A loving and positive influence, he is, however, ineffectual as a father-figure, since he cannot protect the children from the influence of either Tant' Sannie or Bonaparte Blenkins. Burdett, for example, comments that "Otto's faithfulness, his inability to distinguish good from bad and true from false, leaves the children intolerably vulnerable" (*Progress of Feminism* 21). To a certain extent, Otto is feminised; as Waterman notes, Otto "fills the stereotypic role of a woman, roasting potatoes for the children, cooking for his son and for invited guests to his small home, mending and so on ... He is also submissive to the heavy-handed authority of the masculinized Tant' Sannie" (49). Otto takes in and is, in turn, taken in by Bonaparte Blenkins: in accordance with his religious beliefs and innately good nature, Otto is hospitable towards the stranger, and he does not suspect that he is evil, despite Lyndall's recognition that Bonaparte is a liar (*Story* 56). Bonaparte attempts to insinuate himself into Tant' Sannie's affairs and the farm, and gain both power and land, whilst Otto's childlike faith and nature cannot confront the reality of Bonaparte's devious machinations. The latter first tricks Otto into allowing him to lead the Sunday service, a role that Otto faithfully performs every week, and then dupes him into giving him his finest clothes, the suit Otto wears twice a year when he goes into town to „nachtmaal' (66). In providing Bonaparte with his own best outfit, Otto symbolically hands over his authority, and thereby enables Bonaparte to fool Tant' Sannie further. Despite her protestations that she is not a gullible child (51), she is impressed by his appearance: "there was one thing on earth for which Tant' Sannie had a profound reverence ... that thing was new, shining black cloth. It made her think of the „predikant'; it made her think of the elders, who sat in the top pew of the church" (69). Bonaparte's next move, in his attempt to gain power, is to take over the role of schoolmaster, thus assuming authority not only as the religious leader but also as the

educational provider on the farm; significantly, both areas associated with patriarchal control. Lyndall, however, refuses to be taught by him, and walks out of the schoolroom (76). As mentioned earlier, Bonaparte then manipulates Tant' Sannie into firing Otto. After Lyndall defies Tant' Sannie, the two girls continue towards the farmhouse, and she also defies Bonaparte's authority by instructing him to "Move!", upon which, "he, Bonaparte the invincible, in the hour of his triumph, moved to give her place" (91). However, after Otto's death, Bonaparte becomes overseer of the farm, and abuses the children from his newfound position of power – for example, he destroys the sheep shearing machine that Waldo spent nine months making. A week after this, Em informs Waldo that she has found the box of books that belonged to her father in the attic, and gives him permission to borrow any he likes (108). One of the first books that Waldo reads is John Stuart Mill's *Political Economy*:

All he read he did not fully understand; the thoughts were new to him; but this was the fellow's startled joy in the book – the thoughts were his, they belonged to him. He had never thought them before, but they were his ... The boy's heavy body quivered with excitement. So he was not alone, not alone. (109)

His joy is short-lived, however, because Tant' Sannie and Bonaparte burn the book in spite. Bonaparte, in fact, wished to burn all the books, but "Tant' Sannie was dubious. The deceased Englishman had left all his personal effects specially to his child" (114), and he therefore has to settle for keeping the key to the loft in his possession. When Waldo later attempts to retrieve another book from the loft, he is thwarted by Bonaparte who has locked the door. The next day, in a chilling and horrifying scene, Bonaparte almost beats Waldo to death and locks him in the fuel-house, but when Em tearfully informs Lyndall that, despite her begging, Bonaparte refuses to let Waldo out, Lyndall simply walks into the sitting-room, takes the key, and releases Waldo

from his prison. Bonaparte's authority is yet again resisted by Lyndall.

Finally, Bonaparte's initial and devious attempt to legitimise his usurpation of authority through marrying Tant' Sannie is undermined when she overhears him proposing to her niece, Trana. Tant' Sannie is furious, and empties a barrel of salt meat over Bonaparte. In this almost Dickensian scene, he is made to look ridiculous: Bonaparte flees for his life, with the smart black clothing that he stole from Otto covered in fatty, pickle juice. On the whole, then, and despite Bonaparte's injurious impact on the trustful, good-natured Otto, he is given his come-uppance, and his efforts to usurp the position of husband, father, patriarch and landowner come to nought. Nevertheless, the episode reveals the destructive power that negative father-figures possess.

In the third novel, *From Man to Man*, Schreiner again depicts a father figure who is unable to provide either of his children with the protection and support they need. He is a quiet, taciturn man who does not get too emotionally involved with his children. In Rebekah's case, he cannot offer her the knowledge that she desires from him. For example, as a young child, Rebekah remembers following her father with a copy of *Cornwallis Grammar* under her arm, "trying to get him to explain to her what a preposition really was, and when he answered her absently in the cut dried words of the book, she had gone away behind the hedge and lain with the book open before her, and prayed that she might really understand" (*From Man to Man* 173). The narrator does not divulge the father's feelings here, and the focalisation through Rebekah's eyes means that the reader has little access to this character's interiority. After Rebekah marries, the father does not articulate a sense of loss, though a significant index to his true feelings is provided by the detail that, "If the father missed his little wise daughter when he went down to the lands to see how a new variety of wheat was

doing, and had no one to advise with over his grafts and flutes, or to discuss with him new remedies for cattle disease, he said nothing, but buried himself deeper than ever in the pages of his Swedenborg” (93, emphasis added). Rebekah no doubt has inherited her thirst for knowledge from her father, just as she will inherit some of her books from him (173-174), but ultimately he cannot supply her with all she needs to develop further, intellectually and emotionally. His somewhat ambiguous role is reflected in Rebekah’s view of his books:

Her father had some shelves of old brown books: she had read nearly all of them; but, except the histories, none had interested her much: they did not explain to her the world about her, what it was. He had one book called *Pre-Adamite Earth*, which she read and agonised and prayed over, trying to understand it; only after she had grown up she realised it was a book no human being could understand, least of all the man who wrote it. (173-174)

This dry and technical book is representative of how the father is depicted, and is opposed to the imaginative range and emotional nuance that a precocious child such as Rebekah requires. She does, however, treasure one of the books he gave her: a large old atlas, “which lay now on the top of her wooden cabinet. She used to lie on her back for hours, with the atlas open on her chest ... and look at the different countries and seas, and picture them, and fancy she was there” (174). Her father’s legacy is thus equivocal since, on the one hand, Rebekah inherits a love of knowledge from him but, on the other, he is unable to adequately encourage or develop that knowledge.

In Bertie’s case, their father is not able to protect his daughter from being taken advantage of by the tutor, Lawrie. The narrator again divulges little about the father’s feelings, in particular, in relation to Lawrie: “Everyone liked him at the farm, except perhaps the father; and he only showed dislike, if he felt it, by speaking even

less than usual if he was by” (94). Nevertheless, though the father’s muted aversion is registered here, he proves unable to protect his daughter from being violated in his own home. Possibly, their father may have left certain aspects of child-rearing to their mother since, as a farmer, he was fulfilling his patriarchal role as provider.

5.7 (Un)Mothered/(Un)Fathered

Schreiner’s ineffectual, grotesque and childless mothers offer a resistance to, or reaction against, normative feminine roles; but those of her women characters who seem to comply with the socially-sanctioned role of maternity also challenge convention. In line with Hirsch’s ideas, I have suggested that Schreiner’s depiction of ineffectual mothers raises the possibility that women can „write their own [alternative] plots’. In her portrayal of grotesque mothers, however, Schreiner seems to suggest that women who over-comply with socially-sanctioned expectations become gross parodies of the ideal mother – the monstrous and destructive mothers associated with the quintessential female role that Showalter discusses in *A Literature of Their Own*. Conversely, the childless mothers in Schreiner’s fiction resist the maternal role in an attempt to express their unique feminine identity. Nevertheless, there is no place in society for such women: thus both Undine and Lyndall waste away and die. Rebekah’s case is different: she is one of the few portraits of a good mother in Schreiner’s fiction, yet she nevertheless articulates the struggle of a woman negotiating a number of roles and attempting to arrive at some kind of compromise. Whether she achieves this compromise is, however, a moot point.

With regard to the fathers and father-figures in her novels, Schreiner depicts men who are impotent and unable to protect their children, or who are destructive and

harmful. In this way, her characterisation of fathers and mothers is aligned, in effect, „orphaning’ her protagonists, whether literally or emotionally. In adopting these strategies, Schreiner rejects the patriarchal notion of family, in which the wife and children submit to the authority of the father – and all submit to the authority of God. Essentially, then, her depiction of fathers and mothers is a critique of both masculine and feminine identity, and the system that binds these identities in a restrictive performance of gender.

6 Conclusion: The Storyteller

The Artist's Secret

There was an artist once, and he painted a picture. Other artists had colours richer and rarer, and painted more notable pictures. He painted his with one colour, there was a wonderful red glow on it; and the people went up and down, saying "We like the picture, we like the glow."

The other artists came and said, "Where does he get his colour from?" They asked him; and he smiled and said, "I cannot tell you"; and worked on with his head bent low. And one went to the far East and bought costly pigments, and made a rare colour and painted, but after a time the picture faded. Another read in the old books, and made a colour rich and rare, but when he had put it on the picture it was as dead.

But the artist painted on. Always the work got redder and redder, and artist grew whiter and whiter. At last one day they found him dead before his picture, and they took him up to bury him. The other men looked about in all the pots and crucibles, but they found nothing they had not.

And when they undressed him to put his grave-clothes on him, they found above his left breast the mark of a wound – it was an old, old wound, that must have been there all his life, for the edges were old and hardened; but Death, who seals all things, had drawn the edges together, and closed it up. And they buried him. And still the people went about saying, "Where did he find his colour from?"

And it came to pass that after a while the artist was forgotten – but the work lived.

(Schreiner, *Dreams* 119-121)

One of the major difficulties in analysing Schreiner and her work is separating the strands of her writing from the strands of her life. However, it would seem that, although she did not want her life to be written about, in a sense she offered her life through her works. Moreover, she articulated an alternative womanhood and a new space for the construction of feminine identity not only in her writings, but also in her own experiences and choices as a nineteenth-century colonial woman. Schreiner's complex and multi-layered identity was ambiguous and transformative of the social

mores and gender articulations of her day. For example, in a letter to Louie Ellis (Havelock Ellis's sister) in 1884, she comments "I want to wear boy's clothes and *will* as soon as I can get other women to join me" (Cronwright, *Letters* 39). Similarly, in another letter she states "I've not been a woman really, though I've seemed like one" (Cronwright, *Letters* 142). In many areas of her life, she attempted to forge unique and nonconformist negotiations of feminine identity. In this regard, people often misunderstood her or misconstrued both the forceful yet vulnerable aspects of her personality – both in her own time and in subsequent attempts to chronicle her life. The most consistent motif in her identity, however, was that of storyteller.

Indeed, Schreiner's earliest memories are of telling stories. In a letter to Francis Smith, she comments, "One of the first things I can remember, when I can't have been more than three, was walking up and down ... and making stories to myself" (Cronwright, *Letters* 287). This narrative impulse is something she would follow throughout her life, the rhythm of her restless pacing echoing in the stories she told. Her self-identification and essential characteristic as storyteller is emphasised by numerous comments in various letters throughout her life. She declares: "If God were to put me alone on a star, and say I and the star should be burnt up at last and nothing be left, I should make up stories all the time just the same" (Rive, *Letters* 154).

Furthermore, in a letter to Cronwright on 27 March 1913, she expresses her compulsion to write:

I think one is driven to writing; the propelling force which makes all true artists write who do not write either for wealth or fame, is the feeling that so and so only can they express their inward self, the real self that lives away in loneliness. Art is the little crack in the iron wall of life which shuts one in awful isolation through which the spirit can force itself out and show itself to like-minded fellow spirits outside; or rather can creep in through the cracks in their terrible walls that shut in the individual life and say, „You are not alone'. (Cronwright, *Letters* 323)

Similarly, in a letter to Havelock Ellis, she comments, “artistic work takes the life blood out of one. It lives by just as much as you lose” (Cronwright, *Letters* 50). In a sense, Schreiner literally poured her life into her work – or, as the allegory which forms the epigraph to this chapter suggests, the wound of her life provided the mysterious glow of her artwork

Although her storytelling was profoundly personal and private, Schreiner also offered her narratives to the world, and a number of critics have commented on her fear of showing her work to the public. Showalter, for example, observes, in “Schreiner’s letters the artist’s natural reluctance to face criticism is transmuted into a morbid female fear of self-exposure and rejection” (*A Literature of Their Own* 198). While it is true that, in many letters, Schreiner notes her concerns about critical responses to her work, in *From Man to Man* she provides some insight into her view of the process by which art is produced, and those parts of the process to which the critic has no access. This emerges in Rebekah’s discussion of the three stages that occur before art can be offered into the public domain. She begins by remarking, “I often think ... that why men so misunderstand the nature of art is because there are three distinct processes to be gone through before it is given to the world; and men confuse them, though they are really wholly distinct” (471). The first stage, “the all-important element, without which there can be no art and no creation, is the sudden flash, or the slowly growing and intensified perception” (471). Rebekah notes that, in this phase, the proposed artwork “exists absolutely, perfectly, and entirely” – but only within the artist’s mind (472). During the second stage, “the artist’s will does come into play, though only within certain limits” (472), and it is at this point that the work moves from the artist’s mind into the world: “He must will, consciously or

unconsciously, to create it as an external image, or it would remain forever only in his mind” (472). Moreover, the artist chooses whether he should work at all, and if he *does* decide to work, what tools to use and “the amount of sacrifice of other labours and interests and passions which he shall give up to his work” (472). Furthermore, “as he works, he must be looking at the copy within, which is his only guarantee of truth and right. He must not reason and question; he must look. He may change, alter, break and try again, but always in the manner of following his copy” (472). Rebekah then cautions that, although after the work is completed, the artist “may question it as to meaning and turn a fierce, unblind criticism, sterner than that he would throw on the work of any other man” upon it, during the process of making the piece, “there must be only one thought – the vision and the attempts to incarnate it” (472). Finally, in the third stage, the “work is completed as far as ever it can be ... It is now severed from [the artist], the cord is cut; it has now its organic existence quite apart from himself” (473). It is in this final stage that the artist decides what to do with his work, and here “his will is supreme”: “He can burn or destroy it, he can sell it or keep it, publish or exhibit it, save it to be given to the world after his death, show it to one human being or the world” (473). Rebekah finally remarks that the public is usually only privy to the third stage, and thus assumptions and criticisms are made concerning this stage, without necessarily evincing an awareness of the previous stages of the composition of the work of art. In this analysis, then, Schreiner no doubt articulates the stages that she herself experiences in the creative process. She also emphasises the notion that there are areas of experience which are ultimately inaccessible to the reading or viewing public, by virtue of the intensely personal and private nature of producing art. These experiences are, nevertheless, ineluctably constitutive of the “glow” that emanates from within, exits through the ‘life-wound’, and animates the work in

mysterious ways.

Despite her compulsion to create stories, Schreiner often struggled with her role as writer – no doubt because, particularly at the time and in the context in which she was writing, women writers were seen as unusual and unnatural, a problematic view which stems from the relationship between the private and public spheres. In general, writing is an intensely private act, which is then offered into the public domain, but the woman writer is seen as “unnatural” because she transcends the private sphere – her traditional domain as a woman – through her writing. Elizabeth Rasy argues that “there is, in the very image of a woman writing, something more, something out of the ordinary, anomalous, fleeting, ambiguous” (qtd in Cutrufelli 200). According to Maria Rosa Cutrufelli,

This „something more’ has to do not so much with the thing written and its quality as with the very act of writing, a gesture that represents a real break with social patterns and taboos. There is in women writers of all times an awareness of the radicality of this gesture which makes their very life become an area of experimentation and cultural elaboration, almost one of artistic creation. (200)

Schreiner grappled, then, with the roles that society expected her to fulfil and with her own desires – both in her writings and in her life. A manifestation of this struggle is the conflict she felt between wanting to help people and contribute towards progressive social change on the one hand, and her feeling that writing was the more ethical course of action, on the other . She expresses this conflict directly in a letter to Ellis on 24 January 1888:

On one side your nature is like -----’s, and unlike mine. When I want to go to Trafalgar Square and fight the enemies of Freedom of the hour wildly and get my head broken, *you* say I am a fool, and you are *right*. When I run about after prostitutes, ----- writes to tell me I am a *fool* and wicked for leaving my work, and he is *right*. Goethe was a far more highly moral man than Schiller. The man

who sits quietly in his study, writing and working out a great scientific truth, while his little petty state is going to pieces, is greater, more human, more moral than one who, like myself, would rush out wildly and fight. (Cronwright, *Letters* 127-128)

Schreiner's own writings, however, were characterised by a profoundly ethical engagement: writing, for her, was a political act, an act that enabled social change in the public domain as well as one that affected her readers on a personal level. Robbins contends that, "If literature can be one of the sites of the oppression of women, it can also be the site of an imagined alternative" (33). In her writings – whether private letters, allegories, short stories, novels, political and philosophical articles, or non-fictional tracts – Schreiner creates such an "imagined alternative" by engaging with her own individual experience, as well as the issues – both similar and different – of those marginalised due to race, class or gender.

More specifically, in relation to the focus of this study, an examination of Schreiner's novels demonstrates that she questioned established notions of femininity and masculinity by undermining stock Victorian stereotypes, and by revealing the contingency of restrictive notions of gender. For example, her subversion of the stereotype of the fallen woman operates by virtue of a realignment of the binary of „pure' versus „fallen'. The notion of the fallen woman is predicated on her sexual transgression since, particularly at the time that Schreiner was writing, sex outside the sanction of marriage was taboo. Schreiner, however, questions the relationship between sex, morality and marriage. In *Undine* she indicates that the eponymous heroine is „fallen', despite her socially acceptable marriage, because she weds someone she does not love for mercenary and opportunistic reasons. Conversely, and despite the controversy occasioned by *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall's decision not to marry the father of her baby *is* ethical since she does not love him.

Finally, in *From Man to Man*, Schreiner suggests that marriage without love is analogous to prostitution, by comparing and contrasting the fates of the sister protagonists, Rebekah and Bertie.

In a similar fashion, Schreiner critiques socially sanctioned feminine roles in her fiction through her characterisation of mother-figures. On the one hand, the mothers of the central protagonists are distant and ineffectual, or destructive. On the other, as mothers themselves, her protagonists offer a resistance to normative feminine roles. In *Undine* and *The Story of an African Farm*, for example, it seems that both Undine and Lyndall reject the traditional role of mother because they refuse to conform to the social expectations that women's roles are restricted to marriage and maternity. *From Man to Man* is more nuanced, however, since, in the characterisation of Rebekah, Schreiner attempts to articulate the conflictual experiences of a woman balancing the roles of mother, wife and writer/reader. Moreover, Rebekah is empowered to some extent by her economic independence, since she is able to purchase a farm with money bequeathed to her by her father. In a conversation with Frank about the farm, for example, she states explicitly that "it pays all my expenses and Sartje's, and keeps the man and the woman at the farm, and we owe nothing" (444). Although Rebekah remains in Cape Town, she regularly visits the farm in order to ensure its upkeep – and her independent means of livelihood.

Despite the often bleak outlook of Schreiner's novels, then, and the fact that she cannot imagine a place in conventional (metropolitan *or* colonial) society for her heroines, there are still glimmers of hope, in which the future is envisaged as both different and better. For example, in *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall tells Waldo, "this one thought stands, never goes – if I might be one of those born in the future, then, perhaps, to be born a woman will not be to be born branded" (188).

Schreiner not only spoke for a generation of women who were marginalised and silenced, however. In this regard, in her article “Memories of a Friendship”, Mary Brown recalls a letter Schreiner wrote to her in relation to the Women’s Movement in England, in which she states:

Isn’t this good news about women? It is beautiful to feel as sure as I do that a better, nobler time is coming for women, and because for women, therefore, for man, too, and the whole race. It won’t come at once, but it will come at last, slowly but surely. I have no comfort but this. Humanity is at the present day only the tenth part civilised, killing and struggling for self; it will grow more beautiful some day. (39)

Encapsulated within her notion of the necessity for a negotiation of *feminine* identity, then, is a corollary negotiation of *masculine* identity. As Schreiner comments in a letter to Karl Pearson, “Man injures woman and woman injures man. It is not a case for crying out against individuals or against sexes, but simply for changing the whole system” (Rive, *Letters* 66). Thus, she is critical of the system that confines both men and women within narrow definitions of gender and sexuality. Her focus, ultimately, was on the system that created oppression, rather than specifically on individual oppressors, and in this respect, she displayed a prototypical awareness of gender performativity and its significance for both women and men.

However, Schreiner’s social critique extended beyond gender to include class and race. Her concern with universal suffrage, for instance, reflected not only the issues of her own age, but also of future generations. As Burdett notes, she increasingly began to

concentrate her energy upon the African cause ... [and] she spoke out for organized labour united across ‘race’ lines as the only means by which the mass of the population might protect itself from an exploitative capitalist system. She researched the career of Toussaint L’Ouverture, the Haitian revolutionary leader, and enthusiastically read W.E.B. DuBois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*.

She also became intensely interested in Mahatma Ghandi's *satyagraha* movement. (*Progress of Feminism* 13).

Clayton similarly points out that it is a “characteristic tendency of Schreiner’s thinking to shift the special case to the common ground, to assimilate feminism to humanism” (“Paradoxical Pioneer 46). Schreiner’s concern with the women’s movement was thus inextricably linked to the upliftment of *all* people, irrespective of class, race or gender. Given her nineteenth-century colonial location, she spoke, in visionary ways, to the necessity for far-reaching social reforms – many of which, retrospectively-speaking – have yet to take place.

Ultimately, Schreiner was progressive and transformative both in her own life and in her fiction: she forged an alternative feminine identity that was, in many ways, ahead of times. She questioned socially sanctioned notions of femininity and masculinity, and this critique enabled her to envisage (if not realise in reality) spaces in which new identities could be negotiated. In this respect, both her life and her fictions were groundbreaking.

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