

OLIVE SCHREINER:
WOMEN, NATURE, CULTURE.

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OLIVE SCHREINER: WOMEN, NATURE, CULTURE

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This dissertation locates Olive Schreiner as a nineteenth-century colonial woman writer who challenges the traditional association of men with culture, and women with nature.

In Schreiner's writing the oppression of women is situated within an understanding of the social construction of "woman" as closer to nature than man. Through the lives of her central female characters, Schreiner shows how this definition of "woman" works to position women as "other" to culture, both preventing their access to public power and marginalising their fully social activities within culture.

Schreiner attempts to displace definitions of culture constituted through a system of binary oppositions which inevitably privilege masculinity as opposed to femininity by redefining culture in three distinct ways. The patriarchal conception of culture as the sole preserve of men is rejected in Schreiner's demands for women's educational and legal equality, and for their right to economic independence. Conventional notions of culture are equally refused in Schreiner's stress on women's traditional domestic labour as essential to the very emergence and continuation of culture. Finally, the deconstruction of sexual difference as a fixed immutable category within Schreiner's writing exposes the definition of "woman" as socially constructed and legitimated.

The contradictions and tensions within and between these demands illustrate the limits of Schreiner's feminist and socialist politics, and point to how her writing both challenges and articulates aspects of dominant nineteenth-century ideology. At the

same time, such contradictions were vitally important in motivating Schreiner's on-going attempt to change radically the position of women within culture. Moreover, the co-existence of apparently conflicting demands within Schreiner's redefinition of culture suggests the terms of a resolution of the perennial problem within feminist discourse around competing claims for women's equality or for a recognition of their difference.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I shall never be a mathematician, nor a man of science making vast discoveries, nor a great leader of the people bound to them in love and sympathy and giving them voices; I shall never be the mother of ten children, creating them and feeling their dear soft hands on me; I shall never find out if I have the power for music I have always felt I have, shall never know if that craving to paint I have had since I was a child was the craving of power; in my poor little handful of life which consists now mainly of cooking and housecleaning I shall know few things; I am only a broken and untried possibility.

Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis: 25 July 1899.¹

Evaluations of Olive Schreiner's life and work have tended to remain trapped within the terms of Schreiner's own assessment of herself as a "broken and untried possibility". While her potential is frequently elevated to the level of "genius", a sense of her ultimate failure is as pervasive in uncritical celebrations of her "greatness" as it is in dismissals of her work. The ahistoricism of the concept of genius divorces Schreiner from the contexts in which she worked, thus preventing an understanding of what was possible for her as a nineteenth-century colonial woman writer, while its connotations of inherent and effortless brilliance make nonsense of her persistent struggles to break free of the enforced passivity of the Victorian "proper lady"², and to live and work as an independent woman. The notion of genius, moreover, is inseparable within Schreiner criticism from references to her "strange and incredible personality".³ Thus an emphasis on the abnormality of her personal life produces an image of Schreiner that speaks insistently of her inadequacies, irrationality, confusion and ultimately of the inexplicable failure of her potential "genius".

The strand running throughout Schreiner criticism, then, what might be called, in Raymond Williams' terms, the cultural dominant of such criticism, is a persistent concern with her failure.⁴ This is

not to say that Schreiner's work is only interpreted in the light of her "failure". Rather, the representation of Schreiner as a "failed genius", although effectively formed in the past, continues to inform the ways in which her works are "made to mean" in terms of the dominant culture. As Williams emphasises, residual cultural meanings remain an effective element in the present; the active incorporation of the residual, "by reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion" is in fact essential if the dominant culture is to make sense of areas of past experience (122-3).

Most influential in constructing Schreiner as a "failed genius" was her husband, Samuel Cronwright. Not only did Cronwright's tales of Schreiner's impracticality and undisciplined approach to writing popularise the notion of her as an enigma, someone at once empowered and hampered by her "creative genius"⁵, but he also helped produce the Schreiner of later biographies by destroying much of the primary material to which he had access. Subsequent biographers have tended to follow Cronwright's focus on his wife's "strange" personality, and in doing so have either precluded or refused any serious engagement with her writing. To Vera Buchanan-Gould, Schreiner's characters are simply projections of certain aspects of her personality (71); to Marion Friedmann Undine (1929) is "undeniably poor stuff", important only in its expression of the conflicting impulses of Schreiner's personality (1), while D.L. Hobman makes explicit her valuing of Schreiner the person, and in doing so implicitly dismisses her as a writer:

The temptestuous force of her personality was wider than the range of her art, and she never created any character so magnetic and fiery, so perverse and inconsistent as her own. (1)

Like Mary Wollstonecraft, then, Schreiner has been seen less as a significant intellectual and writer than as an "Extraordinary

Woman", and her work viewed with all the attendant condescension of such a perception.⁶

Criticism of Schreiner's writing tends to reproduce the biographical construction of her as a "failed genius" in the very process of trying to explain the paradox she has come to represent. Nowhere is this more apparent than in local literary criticism, in which the need to reconcile the "genius" of The Story of an African Farm (1883) with her later "failure" is all the more pressing precisely because of her status within our own "great tradition" as "South Africa's greatest creative artist".⁷ The strains of this attempted reconciliation speak more of the limits of South African "practical criticism" than of the failure of Schreiner. To Uys Krige, for example, Schreiner is "essentially a poet, highly individualistic, intensely subjective", but lacking the necessary qualities of "detachment" and "majestic indifference" that characterise the "great novelist" (74), while to Richard Rive, she is a "sensitive artist" of "infinite compassion", but one whose "structural interpolations" on philosophy, art and evolution "detract from the aesthetic value of her novels" ("An Infinite Compassion" 34).

Although critics note the lack of attention to any work other than African Farm in biographies of Schreiner, they too ignore or reject Schreiner's other writings and thus reinforce the sense of her bewildering failure. Rive contends that Schreiner's "creativity simply dried up at the end of the century" ("An Infinite Compassion" 43), while Nadine Gordimer claims that her creativity "disappeared into the sands of liberal pamphleteering" and into her "abortive experiments with a distancing allegory" after the publication of African Farm (98). Schreiner dissipated her creativity in writing "about" racial conflict and colonial experiences, Gordimer claims, whereas she should rather have transformed such experiences through

the "power of her creative imagination", for only in this way could she tell the world what "she, uniquely, knew about the quality of human life deformed by those experiences" (98). The story of South African criticism of Schreiner is thus one "full of enthusiasms and partial regrets"⁸, in which the constant refrain is one of unrealised or misdirected potential.

Even when Schreiner's view of herself as "broken and untried" is questioned, as it is in Ruth First and Ann Scott's recent biography, an underlying sense of her failure tends to persist. This is not to deny that First and Scott's work does represent a definitive break with previous Schreiner research. The notion of genius is explicitly rejected in their location of Schreiner within the historical context of colonial South Africa and Victorian Britain, and in the intellectual context of her time: "after Darwin, before Freud, and during the period when Marx's Capital was written" (23). Their detailed account of colonial society is particularly important since previous biographies pay scant attention to the real constraints on women in nineteenth-century South Africa. Buchanan-Gould, for example, refers to how Schreiner grew up "untrammelled in a wild free land" (43), while as late as 1979 the specificity of Schreiner's colonial upbringing is reduced to cultural stereotypes in Joyce Avrech Berkman's reference to "roaming wild carnivore" and "native violence" (5).

First and Scott's stated concern with Schreiner's "failures as well as her achievements" (25), however, slides at times into an emphasis on failure. This is especially evident in their account of Schreiner's inability to integrate her personal experience and her political ideals. While they recognise Schreiner's importance in asserting women's sexual desires, they argue that her problematic relationship to her own sexuality led her to repress any expression of it. Thus Schreiner "typified, to the point of neurosis, the

condition of the Victorian woman seeking a sort of sexual freedom by denying her sexuality" (151). Their portrayal of Schreiner as "repressive", and even more so as "neurotic", represents a labelling that upholds rather than interrogates the notion of her "strange personality", especially since this is so frequently founded on her alleged sexual abnormalities. Similarly, their conclusion that Schreiner was "[b]roken perhaps, but hardly untried" (336) tends to negate the very real success of her struggle to break from the dominant ideology of her time; to be complicit with Schreiner's own view that her life was simply "a striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 53).

Responses to First and Scott's biography further attest to the cultural dominance of the view of Schreiner as a "failed genius". In reviewing the biography, Nadine Gordimer praises its "fascinating account of the neuroticism of this amazing woman, in whose tortured, heightened sense of being all the inherent contradictions of her sex and time existed" (98). As much as Gordimer is "fascinated" by Schreiner's neurotic personality, she uses it to denigrate her⁽⁵⁾ feminism. To regard a campaign for women's rights as relevant to the South African situation was bizarre, she argues:

Schreiner seems not to have seen that her wronged sense of self, as a woman, that her liberation, was a secondary matter within her historical situation. (97-8)

Gordimer thus echoes Marion Friedmann's view that Schreiner "wrote in an unconscious attempt to set at rest conflicting impulses in her personality" (57). More recently, Rodney Davenport has criticised Schreiner's socialism in similar terms, regarding it as merging, after her return to South Africa in 1889, with "a growing, partly irrational loathing of capitalism" (94). Implicit in such views is the assumption that Schreiner's socialist and feminist politics emerged only as the unconscious and irrational attempt to resolve a personal difficulty (not equally as part of her conscious decision

and struggle), and also that her political views were less effective precisely because of their deeply personal motivation.

Ridley Beeton's Olive Schreiner: A Manuscript Source Book (1987) appears at first to be the exact converse of such dismissals of Schreiner. Beeton recognises First and Scott's work as the most thorough and complete biography yet published, but goes on to argue that despite its advantages "something has been missed":

the woman Olive Schreiner herself doesn't seem to be present, moving through these pages with her famous and irritating magnetism. (9)

In his commentary interspersed with quotations from source material, Beeton seems intent upon recuperating First and Scott's challenge to the mythologising of Schreiner. His resurrection of "Schreiner, the personality" carries with it, however, all the attendant denigration of her writing implicit in references to her "genius". Schreiner's writing is variously labelled as the expression of her "masochistic sexuality" (28), her "persecution mania" (30), and as typical of the "emotional exaggeration" of an unbalanced and emotionally immature personality (23-4). Bound up as it is with received notions of Schreiner as "a neurotic, a genius, a little of both" (15), Beeton's commentary illustrates the continuing inability to account for her life and work that is first expressed in the projection of Schreiner as a failed genius.

• What is negated in this representation of Schreiner is her constant struggle. By this I do not simply mean her struggle to write, as symbolised by her recurrent asthma attacks; nor her struggle to find a place in which she could write, as her perpetual travelling suggests; nor her struggle to find an appropriate form in which to write, to which her experiments with allegory attest. Rather, the struggle of Schreiner's life and work is specifically the struggle against women's marginal position within culture. For if, as her letter to Havelock Ellis suggests, Schreiner was excluded

from culture, prevented from becoming a mathematician, scientist or politician by virtue of material constraints such as a lack of education; and if she internalised and perpetuated this exclusion in viewing herself as "only a broken and untried possibility", then the other side of Schreiner's "failure" is her persistent attempt to redefine culture in such a way that women are no longer restricted to a "poor little handful of life", but are instead able^{to} become the active agents of culture.

The thesis of this essay is that Schreiner attempts to redefine culture by wresting the terms nature and culture away from their traditional association with femininity and masculinity. The cultural connotations of women's association with nature are a persistent concern of Schreiner's writing. "We all enter the world little plastic beings," Lyndall tells Waldo in African Farm, but "the world tells us what we are to be ... To you it says Work! and to us it says Seem!" (176). In juxtaposing "working" and "seeming", Lyndall's comment illustrates how the polarising of femininity and masculinity in terms of the nature/culture dichotomy serves to restrict women's access to culture. For as Simone de Beauvoir first noted, women's constant association with the natural powers of reproduction and the consequent inactivity enforced on women, render "woman" a symbol of immanence, in direct opposition to men's active control over and transcendence of nature.

Schreiner's concern throughout her work is with the effects for women of the definition of "woman" as closer to nature than man. Her attention to the association of women and nature points to the pressing need for a redefinition of culture, and is not, therefore, simply an expression of her "obsession with women's liberalisation" (Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 20) nor a concern with overtly political issues that dissipates the strength of her creative work, but rather an integral part of a project which informs Schreiner's

life's work. For if the central female characters of her novels are "branded" as marginal to culture, and if for both Lyndall in African Farm and Rebekah in From Man to Man (1926) the dream of a different position for women within culture is one thought which "never goes", then for Schreiner the realisation of this ideal was always a possibility which could be achieved. Writing to Karl Pearson in 1888, Schreiner spoke of how "the possible regeneration of the race ... must and will come at last: our dreams are not delusions but the forerunners of reality" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 108).

Schreiner's redefinition of culture assumes three different, although related, forms. The argument of Woman and Labour (1911), which is prefigured in African Farm, demands access for women to all forms of paid, creative and socially useful labour, and thus refuses the traditional notion of culture as solely the preserve of men. Schreiner's stress, equally in Woman and Labour and also in From Man to Man, on the importance of women's domestic labour and on their role as mothers, asserts the crucial role of such traditional domestic labour of women to the foundation of culture. This second aspect of Schreiner's argument, then, is one in which the conventional notion of culture is again rejected, through the reclaiming of a specific women's culture essential to the very emergence and continuation of culture. The third aspect of Schreiner's redefinition of culture concerns her deconstruction of the notion of fixed sexual difference, the primary distinction of all binary oppositions on which culture is founded. In Schreiner's novels this deconstruction of sexual difference is evident in her concern with androgyny; in her more overtly political writing and in her letters it is apparent in her insistence on the need to examine not simply "the woman question", but rather more specifically the construction of a gendered subjectivity.

While all these arguments form part of what I term Schreiner's redefinition of culture, there is no sense in which her work represents a coherent, non-contradictory "redefinition" as such. Rather, the project of a redefinition was a progressive, on-going struggle for Schreiner. From Man to Man comes closest to an integration of the various aspects of her argument, and both Schreiner's constant revision of the novel, and her comments on it, suggest that it represents the culmination of her life's work. Writing to Havelock Ellis in 1884, for example, she states:

I wish, I wish I had more power; I would put it all into this book; I would write so that no one who read it would ever forget it. (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 38)

Yet the unfinished state of From Man to Man points to the fact that Schreiner's thinking changed during the period in which she wrote it. Instead of viewing this incompleteness as a sign of her failure, however, I shall argue in conclusion that it is precisely in the co-existence of all her arguments against the traditional notion of culture that the value of her redefinition lies.

My aim in this dissertation is thus not simply to document the various aspects of Schreiner's redefinition of culture. Rather, in doing so I want to suggest the terms of a re-evaluation of her work which breaks with the prevailing perception of her as a "failed genius". As I have already argued, the cultural dominant of Schreiner criticism is a dismissal of her work as too public or too private, too personal or too political, high culture (politically transcendent) or low art (polemical "argument"), a completed Story or a "noble fragment".⁹ Yet it is precisely this split between the public and the private, as symbolised by the culture/nature dichotomy, that Schreiner persistently refutes and attempts to undermine both within her various works, and in the scope and nature of her writing as a whole. For if Schreiner rejects the separation of the personal and the political, and the exclusion of women from

the public sphere of politics and science in Woman and Labour, then her dreams and allegories similarly challenge notions of "culture", by asserting the importance of unconscious creative processes, and culturally de-valued forms of art.

It is therefore not surprising that "her story represents an enigma that remains unsolved" (Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 15). The inability to account for Schreiner is not simply a question of critics applying inappropriate methods of analysis, nor of Schreiner transcending the limits of her time: to suggest this would be to re-assert her "timeless genius". Rather, it is that if Schreiner attempted to re-define culture, culture which is predicated on the dichotomising of opposites and maintained by a signifying system which reproduces a set of ideal divisions (culture/nature; masculinity/femininity; rationality/irrationality), then any reading of her work which accepts the "natural" split between the public and the personal so entrenched within Western thought will tend to obscure, rather than explain or account for her work. The problem that remains for a reading of Schreiner's redefinition is both how to account for the possibility of this redefinition, and how to read it in such a way as to avoid the pitfalls of either an uncritical celebration or of a too critical dismissal of Schreiner's attempt.

In addressing these problems, I shall take as my point of departure the transhistorical and pan-cultural fact of women's association with nature. It is this association that renders women marginal to culture even when they are fully involved in cultural processes, and thus it accounts for the universal devaluation of women, and of their fully cultural activities within the domestic sphere.¹⁰ It is also women's association with the natural powers of reproduction that leads femininity to be defined as a proximity to the body; a body so overwhelmingly "present-to-itself" that it lacks

the necessary distance that enables signification.¹¹ "Woman" thus becomes signifier to the male other: bearer of meaning and culture, crucial support for systems of representation but never herself an agent of signification within these cultural systems and practices.

If the association of women and nature is universal in the sense that it forms the basis of language and society, then there are also specific historical periods and cultural contexts in which this association needs to be all the more rigidly maintained. The period of nineteenth-century British imperialism, itself a function and product of increasing industrialisation, and the South African colonial context formed by both processes, represents a particular congruence of contexts which enforced the association of women and nature, even while, and in fact precisely because, those historical conditions themselves allowed for the association to be undermined.

In Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880 - 1920, Patricia Stubbs argues that the process of industrialisation in Britain both excluded women from production, and created a split between private and public life (x). These two developments, she maintains, were closely related in their effect on the position of women:

Increasingly confined to the home, it was they who became the focus of the new value which was placed on private experience once the public "outer" world of production was stripped of its satisfactions by industrialization and the division of labour. (xi)

Stubbs' comments provide an important insight into the construction of "woman" in late nineteenth-century Britain; an insight I want to elaborate further through the notion of woman as sign and bearer of culture. For it was not industrialisation itself that created the false split between the public and private. As Lévi-Strauss argues in Elementary Structures of Kinship, this opposition, present in every social system, is reinforced by the incest prohibition and rule of exogamy that ensures the dominance of

the social over the biological (479). Re-formulating Stubbs' argument, then, the potentially greater employment opportunities for women made possible by the process of industrialisation rendered essential the strengthening and extension of women's traditional "humanising" role, both literally within the family, and symbolically as bearer of those "natural", humane qualities repressed in the progress of civilisation. Only in this way could "woman" continue to operate as support for, not agent within, a system of economic and cultural production which increasingly offered women (albeit middle-class, privileged women) greater social mobility and economic independence.

In the colonial context, the definition of "woman" was beset by similar contradictions¹². On the one hand, life in the colonies, on the basis of women's own accounts in autobiographies, diaries and letters, did grant colonial women a greater degree of freedom than that accorded their metropolitan sisters. Elsa Smithers, for example, relates how she learnt to "handle the oxen, to drive the wagon, and to shoot for the pot" (36), and how in turn it was she, not her husband, who taught her sons to shoot and plough a straight furrow. When she tells of how she drove the farm cart to Pilgrim's Rest to sell vegetables as a girl of twelve, she quite explicitly foregrounds her own courage and bravery:

It was a tough proposition for a child of my age to go off on this two days' journey with just two raw kaffirs as an escort but at the time I thought nothing of it ... I was always independent. I would not let my parents help me and I prepared everything for the journey myself. (51-2)

Yet the cultural role assigned to colonial women in imperialist discourse was very clearly not that ^{of} Smithers' aggressive adventurer, but rather one of domestic service. In the colonial context, the restriction of women to the domestic sphere, and the necessity of their "humanising" role became, far more so than in industrial Britain, a cultural imperative. Women as wives and mothers were the

crucial support, in a direct, physical sense, of a colonial project founded on "masculine" physical strength. "It is 'not out of the knitted gun or the smoothed rifle'", wrote Liberal MP, T.J. Macnamara, in 1905, "'but out of the mouths of babes and sucklings that the strength is ordained which shall still the Enemy and the Avenger'" (qtd. in Davin 17). At the same time, the "humanising" and "civilising" role of women, together with the missionary enterprise, enabled the cultural representation of the colonial enterprise as a "civilising mission", and hence allowed for its cultural legitimation, however much the brutal actions of the colonizers transgressed the laws of civilisation.

Smithers' own account indicates the force of this restriction of women to the role of passive service. She recounts how she and a friend obtained provisions for the besieged town of Koffiefontein during the Boer War, and how in the process they were caught but escaped from a Boer commando. "These adventures were exactly to my taste," writes Smithers, "and I tingled with pride to think that there were such brave women in South Africa" (181). When Smithers was omitted from the women awarded medals for their service during the war, she recalls feeling "bitterly disappointed":

but five minutes later I was ashamed of myself, for those things do not really matter and I am only too grateful that I was given the chance of doing what I could. (181)

Whatever the greater potential agency of women in the colonial context, then, the definition of the "proper place" of "woman" as one of domestic service constrained women such as Smithers to qualify their activities as specifically "feminine achievement". Yet Smithers' exceeding the bounds of appropriate feminine behaviour in the first place attests to the precarious status of this definition of "woman" in the colonial context.

The assertion of women's association with nature, then, was vital to the maintenance of women's marginal position within

culture, both in Victorian England and in colonial South Africa. While this accounts for Schreiner's persistent concern with the association of women and nature, the pressing cultural need to reinforce this association explains why Schreiner was able to posit a redefinition of culture. For the need to reinforce the association only existed because of its erosion in the greater freedom that became possible for women. What historically enabled Schreiner's redefinition, then, was the contradiction between the real possibilities open to women of her time, and the closing off of these possibilities through prevailing definitions of "woman".

The force of this contradiction bore particularly on Schreiner because of her specific cultural locations, and because of her marginality within these various contexts. It is usual for criticism of Schreiner to concentrate on the debilitating aspects of her isolation from the cultural contexts in which she lived. First and Scott, for example, argue that Schreiner's "sense of exclusion, of marginality, was persistent" (334). She felt herself a "motherless child"; her freethinking "prompted isolation, and at times social persecution"; although she broke with her intellectual isolation in England, she "lived alone, in rooming houses, as an itinerant, without family, and with the most tenuous contact with English social life of any class"; and even back in South Africa "she was too critical, too knowing to fit into colonial social life" (334-5). Although First and Scott's account is sensitive to the personal effects of Schreiner's isolation, this very attention to the personal reinforces the idea of Schreiner as "broken and untried" by negating the radical effect of her marginality on her writing.

As a woman, Schreiner's position within culture was one of exile, and hence, in Julia Kristeva's terms, one of potential dissidence. "A woman," Kristeva claims, "is trapped within the

frontiers of her body and even of her species, and consequently always feels exiled both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very powers of generalization intrinsic to language" ("A New Type of Intellectual" 296). As a woman writer, Schreiner's de-centred position within culture is accentuated, especially since, as Jacques Derrida argues in Of Grammatology, the very act of writing requires the "displacing of the relationship with the mother, with nature, with being as the fundamental signified" (266).

Marginal to culture as a woman and as a woman writer, Schreiner's distance from the specific cultural constructs of nineteenth-century imperialist and anti-feminist discourse is intensified by her persistent status as an outsider. In London, her "unconventional" behaviour, the product of her colonial upbringing, caused her to be seen as "wanting in culture" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 85); in South Africa, her position as an intellectual woman isolated her from those around her, the degree of her alienation evident in her refer^ence to "a nation of lower middle class Philistines, without an aristocracy of blood or intellect or of muscular labourers to save them" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 168). In both contexts, Schreiner's aspirations conflicted with what was possible for her as a woman, creating a contradiction that enabled what was for her a vital political and personal necessity: the redefinition of culture.

Yet pr^ecisely because Schreiner wrote from a decentred position within culture, a reading of her redefinition needs to recognise the particular "anxiety of authorship" faced by women who assume the pen, the symbol and instrument of culture. In The Madwoman in the Attic, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that one of the strategies by which nineteenth-century women writers attempted to resolve this anxiety was by "revising male genres, using them to

record their own dreams and stories in disguise" (73). Literary works by women, they maintain, are thus "in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (73). For a reading of Schreiner, the notion of the palimpsest^{ic} is particularly useful in drawing attention to the presence of meaning where previously in Schreiner criticism only an empty space, an interfering "argument" or "structural interpolation", has been seen. Attention to the palimpsest^sic thus enables the recognition of Schreiner as a serious writer; a recognition of her own insistence that there was indeed a point to her writing, as she comments to Havelock Ellis:

You will think the long rigmarole on sex inartistic [in From Man to Man]. But it bears on the story; it's all point - if only anyone will take the trouble to see the point. (qtd. in Clayton Olive Schreiner 110)

Schreiner's decentred position within culture has further implications for a reading of her redefinition. For as much as this position enables her to subvert, either implicitly or explicitly, the dominant definition of culture, it still remains a position within culture. As a result, her writing articulates at the same time as it challenges the dominant ideology. Not only is it class-bound and often implicitly and explicitly racist, but it also projects onto women of subordinate groups precisely those cultural connotations of women's association with nature that such a redefinition attempts to challenge.

If the class and race bias of Schreiner's writing prevents a purely celebratory stance towards it, then what has become the standard South African Marxist dismissal of Schreiner as simply "the broken-winged albatross of white liberal thinking" is equally inappropriate.¹³ As Cora Kaplan argues in Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism:

The kind of political, critical pugilism actively at work

in male Marxist cultural analysis - a verbal roughing up of the reactionary text - seems less appropriate when socialist feminist critics are looking at women's own representations, which, as social narrative and as fantasy, remain within the history of the development of feminist discourse, a history in itself full of disturbance and division. (3)

This study of Schreiner as a whole is informed by Kaplan's argument that nineteenth-century women's writing articulates a "discourse of self" which speaks both a critique and a reflection of capitalist and patriarchal relations. In conclusion, however, I shall take up more directly her suggestion of the specifically political importance of women's writing for feminism. For at a time when the divisions and disturbances within feminism are perhaps most apparent, Schreiner's redefinition of culture suggests not only the terms of a resolution of the current "crisis" of Western feminism, but also of a feminism specific to the present South African context.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Rive Olive Schreiner Letters: 1871 - 99 390.
2. See Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, and Vicinus, "The Perfect Victorian Lady", Introduction to Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age.
3. Hobman's biography is most marked by references to the "strangeness" of Schreiner's personality, but Meintjes, Friedmann and Gould similarly refer to her neuroticism, repressed sexuality and "odd" behaviour that distinguish references to her "fascinating personality".
4. For Williams' theory of residual, dominant and emergent cultural meanings and values, see Marxism and Literature (121-7).
5. Concluding the preface to The Letters of Olive Schreiner, Cronwright writes of Schreiner as a "woman of genius", one whose mind was "strange and wonderful in some of its manifestations and in some of its physical reactions" (vii), while in a letter to Havelock Ellis he speaks of her as a kind of amoral innocent, someone whose "genius" made her thoughts "unswerving and splendid" and at the same time divorced her acts from any relation to her "mental code of morality" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 67).
6. First and Scott make the comparison between Wollstonecraft and Schreiner in their treatment by biographers, citing E.P. Thompson's criticism of the construction of Wollstonecraft as an "Extraordinary Woman": "And the moral confusions or personal crises of a woman are always somehow more engrossing than those of a man: they engross all other aspects of the subject" (qtd. in First and Scott 18).
Thompson's observation provides a particularly apt critique of the latest focus on Schreiner's personality, Patricia Morris' defence of Cronwright's biography in her summary of "Biographical Accounts of Olive Schreiner". "How illuminating," writes Morris, "to learn that while Cronwright was in bed trying to sleep, she stamped around the

house banging doors; that her need for solitude drove her literally under the table to avoid a caller, who still barged in; that her capacity for concentration allowed her to continue writing while next to her a waste-paper basket went up in flames, or while she reduced her train ticket or a telegram to a masticated pulp" (7). Morris' own account, published in 1983, is far more illuminating in indicating exactly the extent to which the construction of Schreiner as an "Extraordinary Woman" continues to dominate criticism of her work.

7. Michael Harmel Olive Schreiner: 1855 - 1955 (qtd. in Morris 4). Schreiner's status within the dominant South African culture is even more apparent in J.C. Smuts' view of her as a "national possession" (qtd. in Morris 9), "the most famous writer South Africa has ever yet produced" (Preface to Gould 13).

8. The phrase is applied by Stephen Gray to Marion Friedmann's introduction to the 1974 re-edition of Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland (199).

9. The title of a review of From Man to Man by C.M., published in 1926 (Clayton Olive Schreiner 89-90). To the reviewer, From Man to Man is a "fragmentary work of art emerging from a mass of argument" (89); a "work of art so immeasurably finer than the argument that one resents the latter, more so since it does prejudicially affect the story" (89-90).

10. My argument draws on Claude Levi-Strauss', The Elementary Structures of Kinship, and Sherry B. Ortner's article, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?", which builds on Levi-Strauss' opposition of nature and culture in order to account specifically for the universal secondary status of women. Ortner and Levi-Strauss have both been criticised for their assumption of "nature" and "culture" as "givens", rather than as themselves cultural constructs (see Carol P. MacCormack, "Nature, Culture and Gender: A

Critique"). Lévi-Strauss in particular has also been criticised for positing "woman" as the functional opposite of man, and thus of precluding the possibility of women ever being subjects and producers of culture (see Teresa de Lauretis [18-21]). While I shall address these problems in an examination of Schreiner's own position within a specific cultural context, Lévi-Strauss' theory remains important, not in proposing what "woman" is, nor what she should be, but rather in indicating the terms by which "woman" is constructed in the symbolic and cultural order.

11. In "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator", Mary Ann Doane traces the pervasiveness in theories of femininity of descriptions of a closeness or proximity to the body, which renders problematic women's relation to structures of language and the visible, and ultimately to knowledge.

12. For a more detailed account of the contradictory ways in which "woman" was made to "mean" in the South African colonial context, and one on which my argument is based, see Dorothy Driver, "Woman as Sign in the South African Colonial Context".

13. The phrase is used by Nadine Gordimer in "The Prison-house of Colonialism" in an account of C.I. Hofmeyr's argument that Schreiner's belief in the triumph of the liberal democracy, which ultimately developed into the "repressive colonial state", shows "the weaknesses in the thinking of Schreiner and her class" (96). Isabel Hofmeyr similarly dismisses the very real leaps in Schreiner's thinking, by arguing: "Politically, her views on South Africa bore the stamp of an orthodox South African liberalism, while her views on women bore the shortcomings and insights of nineteenth century feminist thinking" (154).

CHAPTER TWO

"TO BE BORN A WOMAN IS TO BE BORN BRANDED": WOMAN AS MARGINAL TO CULTURE

In The Story of an African Farm Lyndall tries to explain to Waldo how women are "born cursed from the time our mothers bring us into the world till the shrouds are put upon us":

"It is not what is done to us, but what is made of us," she said at last, "that wrongs us". (176)

Lyndall's reference to what is "made" of women points to how the oppression of women is situated in Schreiner's writing within an understanding of the social construction of "woman". My concern in this chapter is to outline how Schreiner identifies the social construction of "woman" as founded on the association of women and nature. It is this association which works to exclude women from culture in a material sense, confining them to the "private" domestic sphere and thus prohibiting their access to the "public" external world, and which both marginalises their fully social activities within the home and disavows their more overtly cultural activities: their attempts to gain education, to work outside the family and to "attempt the pen", the instrument of culture.¹

The most explicit definition of "woman" in Schreiner's writing is given by Albert Blair in Undine. Albert asks Undine how she comes to have "such extraordinary views and manners", refusing to describe them as "pernicious" or "reprehensible" because those words "would be almost too strong; say unwomanly" (137). Undine's response is to ask him "what a woman ought to be":

"You are asking me a question hard to answer," he replied, looking with his half-closed eyes into the fire. "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 from one side

or the other; women never must." (137-8)

Despite the apparent ease with which Albert describes "what a woman is", his entire statement speaks of the difficulty inherent in defining "woman". Undine's question is "hard to answer". The problem it represents is underlined in the qualifying emphasis of a "woman to be womanly", and in the repeated normative stress on what a woman "should" be. In the very process of defining "woman", then, Albert's comments undermine the real existence of "woman" and point to the status of the term as a fictional construct: what Teresa de Lauretis calls the distillate of diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western society which work as the "vanishing point of our culture's fictions of itself" (5).

If the subtext of Albert's definition shows that "woman does not exist",² his comments also indicate the terms whereby women are assigned a specific subject position within patriarchal discourse. Neither "striking" nor "peculiar", "woman" is image and object of the male gaze and not agent of the gaze, and her appearance is styled accordingly: coded for visual and erotic impact, she is both looked at and displayed.³ With "no strong views on any question", she is a sign, signifier for the male other, rather than the agent of signification. As a sign, "woman" becomes a cultural token and is accorded a particular role within the formation of civilisation as the object of exchange within marriage: the means by which property is circulated between men.⁴ Neither "too reserved" nor "too affable and undignified", she is the site of sexuality; reduced and confined within the boundaries of sex, "woman" signifies sexual attractiveness and ultimately sexual availability on male terms. Finally, "woman" is the "happy mediate" between all extremes in two senses. In that she is seen as closer to nature than man, she is seen as mediating between culture and nature, not only in the sense of performing what Sherry Ortner terms "synthesizing and converting

functions" between nature and culture (84), but also, as Patricia Stubbs suggests, in offering men the recovery of those "natural" humane qualities that must necessarily be repressed by the demands of a competitive "public" world (6). "Woman" is also mediator in the sense that she is the mark of difference which divides.⁵ As bearer of sexual difference, the most fundamental of all human laws and thus the primary cultural distinction on which all others depend, "woman" is that which allows signification to take place. She is the crucial support for systems of signification (hence Albert's stress on the necessary stability of "woman"), but as bearer rather than maker of meaning she is denied access to those very systems of representation.⁶

If "woman" is so clearly bearer^{and}/not agent of culture, it is not surprising that Undine, with her religious freethinking, her desire for knowledge and her outspoken opinions, represents a "puzzle" that undermines Albert's understanding of the world. "At times I form an opinion of you, at times another, but I never feel sure that I am right", he states (136-7). In trying to understand Undine, Albert indicates how women's difference is ignored within a phallogocratic system predicated on the perpetuation of the same. "I never feel sure I understand you," he comments, "and I do most men" (136, my emphasis). Albert's comments illustrate that there is in fact no subject position for Undine to adopt, no place for her difference, her displacing of the normative view of "woman". The only position available for Undine is one to which others assign her, as Undine herself notes when her brother, Frank, refers to her freethinking as "highly improper":

I was tired of being called strange and queer and odd, and all those other epithets which I had so learned to hate; and there was Frank dragging all my old weaknesses out into the sunshine that the old names might be branded on me again. (35)

Schreiner's central female characters are all "branded", to

varying degrees, as marginal within culture. Like Undine, Lyndall has "such queer ways" (African Farm 192); Rebekah is "unwomanly" and "strange" in her mannish ways" (From Man to Man 157-8), and while her sister, Bertie, does not reject the constraints of her "proper place" as a woman, she too is positioned quite explicitly "outside society" in that she becomes a prostitute. It is through the experiences of these four women that Schreiner traces the effects for women of the definition of "woman", illustrating in each case how women are stigmatised and marked as "other" to culture by their association with nature.

At only one point does Albert Blair momentarily recognise the implications of Undine's being "branded" a woman. After hearing of her early life on a farm in the Karoo, a "pity, nay, a passionate sympathy, filled his heart for her":

for one moment he forgot that the soul which troubled itself further than to find and eat the bread and honey of this life was the soul of a fool - forgot that the only right of a woman is the right of the rose - to smile and be, not to think and live. (140)

In using the metaphor of a rose, Schreiner illustrates how the social construction of "woman" as an object or symbol of immanence is founded on women's association with nature. The effects of this definition are circular, reinforcing both women's association with nature and their marginality within culture. As Lyndall explains to Waldo, women are "shaped to their cursed end" when they are "tiny things in shoes and socks":

"We sit with our little feet drawn up under us in the window, and look out at the boys in their happy play. We want to go. Then a loving hand is laid on us: 'Little one, you cannot go,' they say; 'your little face will burn, and your nice white dress be spoiled.'" (176)

Defined by their physical attractiveness, women are excluded from the world of activity and confined to a domestic context which, as Sherry Ortner argues, is identified as a lower order of social or cultural organisation (79). In Undine's case, the importance of

physical appearance is invoked to prevent her from thinking, almost as if the term "woman" itself were antithetical to reason. As a child, Undine sits looking up at the clouds engrossed in abstract thought, but she is literally shaken out of her reverie:

"Do you wish to ruin your complexion completely, you wicked child, that you sit here staring up into the sky as if you had never seen it before and were bereft of all your senses?" (14)

Any contradiction of their socially defined role as image and symbol of immanence, then, renders women "wicked": not only that which is abnormal and irrational, but also that which cannot be explained. To Gregory Rose, Lyndall's defiance of the passivity imposed on women is both "queer" and improper (193), while Mrs Drummond and Veronica feel that Rebekah is "not always nice and womanly in her ways" because she works in her garden "where people could see her quite well over the gate", and because she is not concerned about her appearance, wearing "the same old brown silk dress for three years" (157-8). Undine's lack of interest in her own appearance confounds her friends, who label her "stupid, terribly stupid and old-fashioned" (84). To her aunts, moreover, such deviance from her role as object of men's attention is a slight on Undine's moral character. Mrs Barnacles and Miss Mell agree that Undine's "idiotic ideas" on religious matters are "all put on ... just to be peculiar" (84). Her "pretence" is all the more serious because she "has need of all her good looks, if she is to go off; men don't take readily to those queer, dull sorts of girls" (84). Thus Mrs Barnacles commands Undine to give up her "unwomanly" behaviour "before it's too late", reinforcing the idea of her as "wicked" in her parting comment: "You'll repent it if you don't" (85).

If they are regarded as "odd" and "wicked" when their actions contradict socially appropriate behaviour, then women as frequently internalise this perception and view themselves in terms similar to

the patriarchal definition of "woman". Undine's pleasure in being as "wild as the dancing waves" when she is alone on the beach, for example, is immediately transformed into shame with the arrival of Cousin Jonathan:

The presence of a second person had in an instant taken all the exhilaration and life out of the morning and brought her back to the disagreeable human world, in which wild hair, wet clothes, and bare feet were terribly disgraceful things. She felt conscience-stricken and looked down into the little pool, wishing she were one of the fishes swimming there. (52-3)

Alone, Undine had observed and tried to catch the fishes so as to study them more closely; with Jonathan's arrival, she wishes that she herself were a fish. Rendered an object of the male gaze, then, she loses the distance between self and nature, while her guilt at contravening socially appropriate gender behaviour translates into an immobility and a desire for absence that graphically illustrates the lack of a subject position for women who attempt to define themselves as "other" to nature in order to gain access to culture. Similarly, her guilt leads her to deny Jonathan's view of her as a "zealous little naturalist":

"I'm not a naturalist; I don't know anything about fishes or anything else," stammered Undine, hardly knowing what she said. (53)

Unable to define herself as "other" from nature, and having no way of making sense of her actions within the norms of proper feminine behaviour except as so divergent as to be "wicked", Undine cannot call herself by culture's terms and accepts her place as a sign within nature.

The effect of the male gaze in rendering woman an object is even more apparent when Undine meets Albert Blair. Like a gleam "as icy and chilling as a moonbeam falling on a glacier", Albert's gaze immobilises Undine:

It was one of these which fell on Undine as she looked round, and it instantly froze her. She knew without looking at him that the cold light was falling on the

small rent in her glove and on her ruffled hair which she had not smoothed before coming out. (104)

As the object of Albert's gaze, Undine is thus not only reminded of her role as image, but she is also "frozen" within nature, trapped as a sign within nature and thus deprived of the ability to speak. Albert is someone whose presence seems to "shrivel us up and leave us standing without an idea or a correct word in all our vocabulary on which we can lay hands" (104-5). In From Man to Man, Bertie is similarly silenced by a male gaze. She talks freely to Rebekah of events on the farm, but when she looks up to see John-Ferdinand looking down at them, "she would at once become still and shell her peas or peel her fruit in silence" (111).

Rendered mute by a male gaze, women are more overtly silenced in the sense that they are actively prevented from speaking. Bertie is constrained to silence, for example, when she tries to tell her aunt of her sexual experience with Percy Lawrie. "One thing I should like to say to you, Bertie," states Aunt Mary Anna, "never attempt such confidences as you were desirous of making to me this evening. If a woman has made a mistake there is only one course for her - silence!" (329-30). Undine's declared intention not to go to church is ignored by her grandfather, while Rebekah's voice also goes unheard. When she writes to Frank of her dissatisfaction with their marriage, he tears up her letter; when she speaks of getting a divorce from him, he disregards her seriousness, belittling her demands as "these silly fancies" (305). As in the case of women viewing themselves as "wicked", so they internalise the cultural script which demands their silence. Bertie imposes a silence on herself when she tears up her letters to Rebekah which tell of her sexual experience with Percy Lawrie, while Undine internalises the rules of silence to the degree that even the words "yes" and "no" seemed to stick in her throat (55).

In a context in which it is neither proper for women "to have

any thoughts at all" (Undine 35) nor to give voice to their thoughts, women are deprived of a subject position within culture. Yet precisely because "woman" serves as support for systems of representation, as I have argued, there can be no ambiguity about the position of women. As Mrs Snappercapps comments in relation to Undine's stated agnosticism: "You must be something; nobody's nothing" (265). Women who confound culture's categories in subverting the notion of a "womanly woman" are "branded" - forced to bear the permanent mark of their transgression. In Undine, Alice Brown, seduced and then abandoned by Albert Blair, is "a woman who had come no one knew from where, with only a baby, and her story was not difficult to read. Her neighbours read it after their fashion and called her a wicked woman, a very wicked woman" (191). Alice's lack of a geographical location translates, then, into an absence of social position; a lack of positioning which cannot be tolerated, but which is instead immediately read as a sign of her own "wickedness". When her baby dies, Alice disappears and Undine's grandmother's servant, Nancy, states:

She's come from nowheres and she's gone to nowheres ...
Women that do the sort of thing she's been a-doing of,
they never have no natural feeling. (201-2)

The death of Alice's baby, in suggesting that Alice is unable to sustain life, reinforces the perception of her as "unwomanly" and lacking in "natural feeling". Alice's supposed absence of feeling also relates to the particular role assigned to women by virtue of their association with nature: what Patricia Stubbs calls their role as bearers of compassion and sympathy. As Stubbs notes, the identification of women with the internal world of feeling assumed a particularly elevated position in the context of nineteenth-century industrialisation because "the mechanisms of competition, capital accumulation and profit made impulses such as compassion and human sympathy an uneconomical luxury" (6).

In the South African colonial context, where masculinity and femininity were sharply polarised and where the pressures of the frontier helped forge a particularly aggressive masculinity, the humanising role of woman became, even more so than in industrial Britain, a cultural imperative. Schreiner exposes the debilitating effects of this construction of "woman" as bearer of feeling in her presentation of Bertie in particular. The contrast ^{between} the lives of Rebekah and Bertie, who is most closely associated with nature of all Schreiner's female characters, moreover, serves to heighten the sense of Bertie's oppression as a function of her affinity with nature.

Rebekah is portrayed as actively controlling nature. Even as a child she assumes the "masculine" role of penetrating the land, venturing alone into the bush surrounding the farm to collect specimens of insects, plants and rocks, and she advises her father on his crops and on remedies for cattle disease. As an adult, she becomes a serious naturalist and buys a wine farm, which she runs specifically as a business venture. In contrast with her sister, Bertie is represented as working with nature. She tends the flower garden, and acts as surrogate mother to the domesticated farm animals, rearing hand-lambs and sitting outside the kitchen "with her apron full of goslings which she had been feeding, and which she was going to carry down to the dam, as the hen refused to lead them" (96). In her role as mediator between culture and nature, Bertie performs what Sherry Ortner describes as "lower level conversions from nature to culture" which are associated with the particular, personal concerns of the domestic sphere as against the higher relations of the public domain (79-80). She gathers oranges and figs for preserves and "was busy all day making jams and almond cakes" (104), and Percy Lawrie paints "beautiful illumined mottoes with borders from the flowers which Bertie brought him" (94).

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Associated so closely with nature, Bertie represents to both Percy Lawrie and John-Ferdinand the opportunity to regain their "natural" humane qualities. To John-Ferdinand, for example, she is "the one absolutely pure and beautiful thing life has ever yet shown me", someone in whose presence he is "a noble and better man" (122). Bertie's providing access to the "natural" is symbolised in that she helps Lawrie establish a garden in the bush surrounding the farm, and she is taken by John-Ferdinand to a pre-existing garden in the kloof. The gardens themselves, however, reveal the contradictory demands placed on Bertie in her role as providing access to "natural feeling"; a contradiction which is evident in the ambiguous position and status of the men themselves.

Lawrie and John-Ferdinand are Englishmen, and are consequently "outsiders" at Thorn Kloof, both to Rebekah's father who has lived in the colony for twenty-five years, and to his neighbours who are "unlettered velskoen-wearing Dutchmen" (77). The farm, "tucked away among the ribs of a mountain" (77), is on the boundary of culture; a place where "the noisy babbling, worried, worrying world crept only once a week through the post-bag of the boy who brought letters and newspapers from the town" (86). In the context of Thorn Kloof, then, both men are associated with culture; an association their activities further reinforce. John-Ferdinand reads Milton and annotates a copy of Tennyson's Idylls of the King, while Lawrie is not only Bertie's tutor, but he also plays the piano and paints.

Yet if Lawrie and John-Ferdinand are associated with the "masculine" world of culture, then they^{are} equally marked by their "feminine" qualities. Bertie's fears about her tutor, for example, disappear when she meets him, because, as she tells Rebekah, "He is so lovely and small. "He's smaller than I am - He keeps on smiling" (82). Frank comments directly on Lawrie's "feminine" appearance, saying to Rebekah: "I'm sure he uses coco-nut oil for his hair. One

can forgive a man a great many sins, but not that" (84). Although John-Ferdinand assumes the position of colonizer, coming to South Africa to buy a farm, he too is defined by "feminine" attributes. Not only does he never go hunting, but when the "little mother" offers him a gun to go shooting, his refusal makes her feel ashamed, "as if she had offered him something wrong" (110-1). Through her portrayal of these men, then, Schreiner both exposes the myth of the aggressive frontiersman, and points to how a forceful, aggressive masculinity is constructed through the colonial project.

The contradictory positions of John-Ferdinand and Lawrie are carried over into the gardens that they establish. On the one hand, both gardens are beyond the domestic law of the farmhouse, and in this sense represent a freedom from cultural constraints. Against the domestication and control of nature on the farm, Lawrie's "wild flower garden in the bush" suggests greater fertility. He tells Bertie, for example, that the wild flowers would do better "up there in their natural soil than down in the old soil of the house garden" (95). In that John-Ferdinand's "courtship" of Bertie takes place in a garden in the bush, his garden also seems to represent a natural retreat from urban culture and its conventions.⁷ As an enclave beyond the control of Bertie's family, naturally shielded by a thick patch of olive trees, and as a symbol of the fertility of nature in the midst of the dry bush, John-Ferdinand's garden suggests a setting conducive to the yielding of sexual desire.

Despite their suggestion of a space outside the law of culture, both gardens represent a domestication of the wild and retain vestiges of civilisation. Lawrie's garden, although made of wild flowers, is still cultivated, and he and Bertie "went often to see how the things were growing" (95). John-Ferdinand's garden is a "little parlor in the bush", in which "the bare space between the rocks and the bush ^{was} just like a little square room, with a rich soft

carpet" (113).

In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx distinguishes between two garden metaphors - one a wild pre-lapsarian Eden, the other a cultivated, man-made garden - and argues that the confusion and ambiguities in these competing schemas plagued the initial Virginia settlement (qtd. in Kolodny "Honing a Habitable Languagescape" 201). The reason for this "plague" is suggested by what Annette Kolodny terms the feminization of the colonial landscape:

To avoid the heart of that particular darkness, ever since Columbus, male adventurers to the New World have projected onto it a metaphorical complex which represented for them all forms of comfort, protection, nurture, and, at the same time, guaranteed them both possession and mastery: almost inevitably, then, exploiting a gender predilection already available in most Indo-European languages, the landscape became an experiential analogue of the human feminine. (Kolodny "Honing a Habitable Languagescape" 189)

While Kolodny bases her argument on American colonial documents, the colonial representation of Africa invokes a similarly feminized land. In his analysis of Rider Haggard's fiction, for example, David Bunn shows how the African landscape is consistently associated with the woman's body, and exploration figured as an explicitly masculine act, "a moment of penetration into a suggestively feminized locale" (8). Given this construction of the colonial land, then, reference to a man-made garden within the colonial space would question the representation of it as a "virgin space": the very image which was used to legitimate economic exploitation of the colonies, and which permitted the recurrent accommodation to an alien and often hostile land that was demanded of the colonisers.

For colonial women, the feminized landscape projected by male explorers was not one with which they could easily identify, not surprisingly since it was based on an image of woman idealised in a negative sense (all-nurturing mother or all-passive bride), and one who could be as threatening and destructive as she was beautiful. As Kolodny demonstrates, American frontierswomen were clearly uneasy

with the projection of the colonial land as feminine, invoking not the recovered Paradise, nor the fortuitously found Eden as did their male counterparts, but rather cultivated and woman-made gardens.⁸

In From Man to Man, Schreiner's portrayal of Bertie points to a similar rejection of paradisaical projections of the colony. While the gardens represent a refuge for Lawrie and John-Ferdinand, Bertie is afraid of bush surrounding the wild flower garden, and equally ill at ease in John-Ferdinand's new found Eden, as her nervousness and near silence in the garden suggest. Schreiner's resistance to the colonial feminization of the land extends further, however, in that the confusion between the metaphors of a man-made and an Edenic garden appears to be deliberately invoked in the conflicting status of the gardens. Both cultivated and wild, symbols of a "natural", untainted freedom, and yet marked as the very products of culture, the gardens obscure the boundaries between the two garden metaphors, thus exposing the contradictions at the heart of the colonial quest for a recovery of an Edenic past.

If the nature of the gardens reveals the impossibility central to the colonial quest, then Bertie, in that she is the connecting link to "natural", becomes a metaphor for the colonized land. When he speaks of his love for Bertie to Rebekah, John-Ferdinand states:

For the first time I understand now how men have made a god of women - the eternal virgin mother. (122)

As "mother", Bertie promises all forms of nurture, gratification, and a sense of primal harmony with nature, while as "virgin" she lacks the threat represented by the mother's body - the potential annihilation of self - and thus promises protection against the perceived sexually threatening and engulfing nature of the alien land. The projection of these contradictory demands onto Bertie is especially evident when she fails to remain "the one absolutely spotless, Christ-like thing" to John-Ferdinand because of her

previous sexual experience with Lawrie, and is rejected by him for her "sin".

If Bertie's acceptance of her position as bearer of feeling is the source of her oppression, there are also severe costs involved for women who refuse their position as bearer of "womanly emotion". After rejecting George and Harry Blair's proposals of marriage, Undine feels herself "cruel" (133), as if she were "a heartless creature and horribly hard" (124). She experiences a period of emotional sterility which suggests that women, unlike men, do not have the possibility of recover^{ing} the "natural" qualities which must be repressed in the entry into culture. Lyndall also experiences a "coldness" after refusing to marry her "stranger":

"I am so tired. There is light, there is warmth," she wailed; "why am I alone, so hard, so cold? I am so weary of myself! It is eating my soul to its core - self, self, self! I cannot bear this life! I cannot breathe, I cannot live!" (226)

⊗ As Lyndall's comments suggest, women's rejection of their role as
 2) bearer of feeling translates into an overwhelming sense of isolation
 which further underlines their sense of marginality within culture.

The limited cultural space afforded women, and their role as bearers of emotion, is reinforced by the type of education available to them. Extremely disillusioned with boarding school, Lyndall returns home to tell Waldo:

They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are. They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate. They are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question, "Into how little space can a human soul be crushed?" I have seen some souls so compressed that they would have fitted into a small thimble, and found room to move there - wide room. A woman who has been for many years at one of these places, carries the mark of the beast on her till she dies, though she may expand a little afterwards, when she breathes in the free world. (173)

Formal education thus entrenches women's marginality within culture, only teaching them, as in the case of Mrs Snappercaps, to become a "proper lady": "to play the piano and make slippers and caps and to

use long dictionary words without the slightest idea of their meaning" (Undine 253).

For women who attempt to gain access to culture outside formal education, moreover, the force of the notion of the "proper lady" remains, making their attempts to gain knowledge either invisible or illegitimate. Although she is reading John Stuart Mill's Political Economy, Undine is immediately "branded" as a woman on sight by Cousin Jonathan:

"You read all manner of trash and sentimentality till your mind is completely enervated; you came down here this afternoon to read some of Mrs Browning's poetry and effete nonsense, I have no doubt." (92)

Albert Blair labels Undine's desire for knowledge as inappropriate in a more subtle, but no less damning way. When he meets Undine out walking, he offers to carry her book. As he glances down at the title, "Undine saw the satirical lines at the corner of his mouth and eyes grow deeper; but he only said in his blandest tone, 'Rather stiff reading, I should imagine'" (127-8). Even as Albert speaks, Undine's skirt is caught in a dry branch, as if to reinforce the effect of his comments in confining her to a position within nature.

Like all other definitions of their "proper place", the definition of women's position in relation to knowledge becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Undine's favourite book is a copy of her father's A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of Will. Recognising that everyone would scorn her reading "such an old man's book", though, she makes sure it is always safely hidden "where there was no fear of its being discovered by prying eyes" (21). The fact that Rebekah's study is the only room in the house ever locked also suggests a certain uneasiness with her role within culture. The effect of a definition of "woman" as closer to nature thus works not only to restrict women's material access to education, but also to deny them a sense

of identity within culture.

The psychical implications of women's marginality within culture are particularly apparent in their experience of creativity. As Susan Gubar argues in "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity", "woman" is an art object in the production of culture: "she is the ivory carving or mud replica, an icon or doll, but she is not the sculptor" (293). Undine is clearly constructed by Albert as the object of his artistry. He considers proposing to Undine as she is "a pretty little thing, and if she were trained might be good for something" (130). Once Albert does propose to her, she becomes his possession, to be shaped into an image of "womanly perfection". "You must not spend so much time over your books as you have done", he tells her:

"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 ... Now you belong to me, I don't want you to have dark rings round your eyes, as though you had sat up all night. My wife must be always bright and beautiful, you know." (142)

In constructing Undine into an image of "true womanhood", Albert insists that she do nothing to make herself "peculiar", as there "is nothing so hateful in a woman as eccentricity of any description" (147). Albert's eradication of Undine's difference is reinforced by the way in which their relationship is linked with the image of "silent white snow" (142). Objectified as the virgin page open to the inscription of Albert's desire, Undine is herself rendered as mute as the snow. When she tries to speak to Albert:

The words were always on her tongue, always in her heart; but the white face with its wonderful crushing influence over her kept them unspoken. (145-6)

The extent of Albert's "crushing" of Undine is most apparent when he terminates their engagement in a letter to Undine. Undine is unaware of the exact contents of the letter; she knows only that "the dream of her life had vanished, to return no more" (157). Having been constructed as an art object, she lacks any sense of

distance between herself and Albert's construction of her. Thus she internalises the destruction of her ideal, both in her ingestion of Albert's letter, and by identifying herself with a feather that is buried within nature:

She put the letter whole into her mouth and chewed it fine between her grinding teeth; then she sat still and watched a tiny white feather that lay on the muddy water bobbing up and down, up and down. Her mind seemed a perfect vacancy but for the thought of that little white feather. She wondered if it would be caught by the nodding leaves of the reeds that dipped into the water, or whether it would be stranded on the oozy bank - looked at the little white feather and wondered, and ground the letter fine, fine between her teeth. (157)

Later, Undine acts out her fantasy of being trapped within and destroyed by nature by returning to the muddy pool and contemplating suicide. Having been "killed into art", to use Gubar's phrase, her fantasy is the logical outcome of her construction as art object by virtue of her association with nature.

Although Undine does not commit suicide at the pool, she does "kill herself into nature" as the result of her internalising of cultural scripts. When she is invited by George Blair to view his collection of pictures, she is fascinated by one particular oil painting which depicts the scene of a battlefield with a dead soldier in the foreground, his feet clasped by a woman who crouches beside him. Harry Blair admits that he "can make nothing" of the picture, to which Undine replies:

"It seems to me to tell its own story...He was a noble, high-blooded lord, and she a poor serf, with only her soul and beautiful body to give him. He hardly cared to take them, though it was for nothing; and now, in the hour of death, she has followed him and found him lying dead; and she is crouching at his feet in agony because he is gone, and in wild joy because he is hers alone now, hers and no other's, if only that she may lie at his feet and die there." (103)

Harry Blair comments that Undine is "very like the woman in the picture" (106), while the soldier's eyes, like Albert's, are "pitilessly hard in expression" (102). Like the "poor serf" in the

picture, Undine continually seeks for ways to serve Albert, sacrificing her freedom in marrying George Blair so as to be able to give Albert the money his father has denied him. Albert, unaware of Undine's sacrifice, scorns her, and it is only when he is dead that Undine is able to express her passion for him. She spends the night with his dead body, whispering "the wild words of love that to the living she would never utter" (363). At this point, though, Undine realises the fallacy of the script she has been living, and her dream of being united with Albert shatters:

With a cry, as of one whose last hope has passed away, she let the light fall upon the floor, and the glass broke into a thousand fragments. (364)

As imaginary as Undine's dream may have been, it was precisely this fantasy that formed the material of her life, and which was all the more powerful in sustaining her in bleak periods of emotional "coldness". Deprived of it, then, her only option is to fulfil the "real" position of women within a culture which reifies them as art objects, even as it excludes them from creative action. She goes out into the night in search of death:

Death - only that, nothing more. What she had longed and prayed for; what she had looked for in the muddy pool; what she had sighed for in the days of emptiness - it had come at last. (369)

Undine is thus not, as the critical tradition has claimed, simply an earlier version of material that Schreiner re-worked to better effect in her later novels, nor is Undine's death only an expression of Schreiner's "morbidness" and unrelated to the narrative.⁹ I have dealt with the novel in such detail precisely because no other work of Schreiner's has so clear an account of the effects of women's association with nature on their experience of creativity. It is also through attention to the issue of women and creativity that the status of Undine's death within the text can be recognised as the logical extension of a life which is experienced as an art which tells of her own destruction, and an art - the art

of being "perfect woman" - experienced as a kind of life.

As a result of their construction as artefacts rather than as creators, women experience their own creativity as "a violation, a belated reaction to male penetration rather than a possessing and controlling" (Gubar 302). When Rebekah writes in her journal she gets up to pace the room:

She clasped her hands behind her with the pen still between her fingers, and it made a large ink-spot at the back of her little blue print skirt. (187)

As a metaphor of menstrual blood or the blood of penetration, the ink spot illustrates Rebekah's experience of writing as a reaction to rending, a violation of her body rather than an active possessing or controlling. In her letters, Schreiner speaks of her experience of writing in similar terms; writing to Karl Pearson in 1886, for example, she comments on how her work "is taking my very life's blood" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 105). The metaphor for women's artistic expression as a "bleeding into print" (Gubar 302) thus extends the sense in which "woman" is "branded" as marginal to culture. As the product of a male imagination, she is not only denied her own voice and identity, but her attempts to become a creator in her own right are also experienced as a painful wounding.

As the objects of exchange within marriage, women are "branded" in the sense that they are marked as the tokens of trade, and in a way that renders their experience of marriage an equally painful process. When Undine finds work making clothes at the diamond fields in Kimberley, the calico is so stiff that she "worked a small hole in her finger which stained the work with little drops of blood" (300). The stained cloth recalls an earlier image of Undine: when she decides to marry George Blair she crushes a bunch of cluster roses in her hand "till the thorns pierced it" and "the blood fell in a crimson drop on her crumpled white dress" (178-9).

Taken together, then, the images illustrate how women are "killed" or sacrificed into both marriage and art.

Undine's marriage to George Blair further illustrates how women are the bearers of culture, rather than in control of it. At first, Undine's proposition seems to suggest her use of marriage as a means of gaining material power. "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," she tells George Blair, "then I will marry you as soon as you wish. I do not love you, but I will be a good wife to you" (179). Yet Undine's marriage to George Blair is specifically motivated by an attempt to serve his son, Albert; her demand of material reward, which she intends to leave to Albert, the means of this service. Rather than empowering her, then, Undine's marriage ensures the circulation of property from father to son, and thus represents the perpetuation of patriarchal authority in terms of the male ownership of property and women.

Although Undine's appropriation of marriage is constrained by her position as a sign of men's social exchange, there is a sense in which her action does represent a radical challenge to the status of marriage within patriarchal society. In blatantly "selling herself" to George Blair, Undine quite self-consciously and actively takes on the value of an object of exchange, flaunting her position as a sign in a way that foregrounds the foundation of marriage - its basis on the "creed" of Albert and his father: "the creed that all women have their value in coins though some mount high" (Undine 183). In that she becomes a prostitute, Bertie similarly exposes the exploitation and objectification inherent in the notion of "woman" as object of exchange that is obscured by the cultural and legal legitimacy of marriage. Not only is Bertie literally the object of exchange between men as a prostitute, but she is also produced as a sign in exchange systems: constructed as both the "eternal virgin mother"

(122) and as a "fallen woman", she is a sign that oscillates between the images of prostitute and mother-figure and thus represents the means by which men express their relationships with one another.

The imprisonment of both Undine and Bertie as a sign within culture is figured in terms of nature imagery, as if to underscore the basis of this construction of "woman" as the association of women and nature. When Undine receives Albert's letter retracting his marriage proposal she is trapped within nature to the extent that she feels herself going mad. After reading the letter, "a sudden wild impulse" to flee takes hold of her (157). Her ankle sinks "deep in the soft mud" (157), however, and later it is as though the force of nature prevents her from moving at all:

She did not seem able to get further; again and yet again she thought she found herself in the same place; and every time she looked up at the great red sun it seemed a great, laughing, cruel human eye, looking down at her from the clear blue sky. (158)

Lying on the ground, Undine writhes in pain, feeling herself pinned against the earth "like a trodden worm" (158).

Bertie is similarly entrapped within and impaled on nature. When she runs from John-Ferdinand's "little parlor in the bush" after his rejection of her "sin" of "giving herself" to Lawrie, "an out-stretched branch of mimosa caught in her skirt and tore it from top to bottom", and only a "rag of white muslin with its blue bow [hung] from a thorn to show she had been there" (136-7). Bertie thus becomes a symbol within nature; her experience of nature the exact opposite of Rebekah's control over nature. Returning to the kloof after her marriage, for example, Rebekah felt "as if something went out from me and clasped itself about everything" (286).

As the story of Bertie as a "fallen woman" progresses, she becomes increasingly caught within nature, and overpowered by it. She repeatedly tries to escape from the public knowledge of her "sin", travelling from Thorn Kloof to Rebekah's house in Cape Town,

then to her aunt's house in the isolated Karoo, and finally leaving South Africa for England with another "exile", "the Jew", who is never named in the novel. In each place, however, Bertie is reminded of her "fall", and in ways that extend the metaphor of an entrapping nature first suggested in her flight from John-Ferdinand. When she tries to tell John-Ferdinand of her experience with Lawrie, she is oppressed by the sultry stillness of the bush and by the incessant crying of the cicadas. Similarly, when Mrs Drummond asks her about Lawrie "the scent of the flower garden seemed to come up overpoweringly" (167). Entrapped by and within nature, then, Bertie becomes a sign of nature within language, in contrast to Rebekah who orders nature in culture's terms, categorising the trees in the kloof in terms of sexual difference (243).

In her association with nature, Bertie is not only rendered a sign of nature, but she is also seen as a symbol of the excess of nature, an abandoned "natural" sexuality that is deeply threatening. For Victorian patriarchy in general "woman" signified an uncertain and troubling "otherness", as Freud's association of female sexuality and the "dark continent" suggests, but in the colonial context women's mediating between culture and nature is especially threatening precisely because the alien land is neither fully known nor controlled. As L. J. Jordanova argues, where the land or nature is that which "has not yet been penetrated (either literally or metaphorically)", as it is in the colonial context, "woman" is seen as a dangerous source of disorder (66). Frank reflects this perception when he stresses the danger of Bertie having a male tutor. "Bertie'll be the finest looking woman in Africa in a few years," he states, identifying Bertie's sexuality as the source of danger:

"It's a dangerous thing for any young man, or old either, to have a head of curls like Bertie's dancing within three feet of him" (84).

In that she signifies the excess of sexuality, Bertie progressively loses her value as an object of exchange in marriage. She leaves Cape Town after overhearing women at a dance gossip about her "damaged reputation", which is itself symbolised in the tearing of her skirt at the dance: "The white gauze which covered the silk skirt tore from the waist to the bottom and the long gossamer flounce made a streamer behind her" (233). Although Bertie escapes from the dance through a window she is trapped in nature in doing so, and in a particularly fertile nature, which only serves to reinforce her status as symbol of the excess of nature:

as she stepped into the bed of rich soft mould her feet sank almost ankle deep into it. She turned and closed the window softly, and with difficulty drew her feet out of the wet earth. (235)

After her escape from the dance "the white skirt hung wet and draggled with mud" (228), and Rebekah knew that "the dress would never be any good again" (229). That the torn and spoilt dress is a metaphor for Bertie's fate in cultural exchange becomes even more apparent when her aunt asks Bertie to leave the house, fearing her contaminating effect on her daughters' morality. "A woman's character is like gossamer," Aunt Mary Anna states, "once you've dropped it in the mud and pulled it about it can never be put right again" (326). The finality of this statement is confirmed by Bertie's subsequent fate at the hands of "the Jew". Although it is suggested that "the Jew" wishes to marry Bertie, he never does, and instead she becomes a "kept woman" at his house in London, and then a prostitute: the ultimate image of sexual and moral contamination for Victorian society.¹⁰

Yet if Bertie is explicitly "outside society" as a prostitute, she is also finally exiled from nature. While Bertie experiences a "horror of pain" because the houses in London are "all alike, so exactly alike" (403), she finds no relief in nature, unlike Rebekah

who, when she goes to the blockhouse overlooking Cape Town, feels that "my little life, which sometimes seems so small when I am shut up in the house alone, grows great and beautiful" (292). When Bertie asks "the Jew's" nephew to take her to "the country", she is alienated by the English countryside, and returns home disappointed.

The experience of nature for women in Schreiner's fiction thus leads one to question Dorothy Jones' assertion in "A Kingdom and a Place of Exile: Women Writers and the World of Nature" that:

Nature as a place of exile may offer solace and refuge from social oppression, but women writers have also perceived in it a source of power and energy, and their work often takes on a mythic dimension as they depict women participating in that power and wielding it. (257)

While nature may offer women "solace and refuge from social oppression", as Jones argues, it is a form of refuge that only serves to reinforce their marginality within culture, and thus to further entrench their social and cultural oppression. Rebekah's retreat into nature as a child, for example, allows her a freedom of movement denied by the "proper" feminine behaviour demanded of her in the house, and the space to create a sense of identity through fantasy and storytelling other than her status within the family as a "strange child". Yet it is precisely Rebekah's escaping into nature that reinforces the dominant perception of her as a "tomboy", an alien to cultural norms of true femininity, and hence as someone who is "outside culture", as "old Ayah's" comment indicates:

If she were my child, I wouldn't let her come into the house at all, where respectable people live who like to be indoors. I'd just tie her fast with a chain to a monkey post outside, and let her go round and round there. Then she could eat Kaffir beans like a baboon, and climb, and scream as much as she liked. (69)

Nature can only represent a refuge for women, then, if the possibility exists for their entry into culture. Without this access, they remain, like Bertie, trapped within nature and with little or no control over their lives. Since access to culture for women is so limited, however, the notion of nature as solace must

remain an extremely ambivalent one for women. Writing to Havelock Ellis from Matjiesfontein, for example, Schreiner comments:

It is curious and to me very attractive, this mixture of civilisation and the most wild untamed; the barren mountains and the wild Karroo and the railway train. I know that at any time by leaping into and travelling twenty-four hours without stopping I could cover the 500 miles between this and Cape Town. If only my asthma keeps away, this is the ideal place I have been so longing for. (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 167)

For Schreiner, the attraction of Matjiesfontein lay specifically in its combination of civilisation and wilderness: the wild Karroo offering her a sense of freedom in nature and the railway crucially keeping open her access to the cultural world, thus eliminating the threat of total isolation that she experienced in the bush.

Bertie's experience of nature in particular questions Jones' argument that the identification of women and nature "opens up possibilities whereby a woman character may learn to command a space of her own - a space which represents her own body and her sexuality" (269). Bertie's identification with nature means that contradictory demands are projected onto her, as John-Ferdinand's construction of her as "the eternal virgin mother" suggests (122), thus allowing no space for her own determination of her sexuality. Her lack of any sense of distance between herself and nature also leads her into self-destructive actions; either metaphorically, in uprooting the wild flower garden, or literally, in suffering the trauma of her experience with Lawrie in her own body. Bertie's recovery from illness is also prefigured in the aftermath of a storm when "all the earth had been washed clean and fresh", and she feels a "curious quiet" and sense of calm as she watches the sunset turn "all the west ... a bloody pall of crimson" (102). Whether the blood-drenched landscape suggests freedom from pregnancy, or simply Bertie's mental relief, the image indicates a fusion between nature, Bertie's own body, and her sense of herself that negates Jones'

suggestion of the self-determining possibilities for women in their association with nature.

The problem within Jones' account of the creative possibilities of women's association with nature resides in her too literal reading of Simone de Beauvoir's argument that nature represents a "kingdom and a world of exile" for women, which she takes as the starting point for her essay. For while de Beauvoir states that nature is, for the adolescent girl, "her kingdom as a whole" (385), she goes on to stress that "as a member of society, she enters upon adult life only in becoming a woman; she pays for her liberation by an abdication" (386). What the young girl is required to give up in becoming a woman is precisely her sense of nature as a "kingdom", a place where "she proudly takes possession of herself" (385). Yet although de Beauvoir is correct in arguing that the young girl only "becomes a woman" in adolescence, puberty is in fact the second determining stage in gender identity, the stage at which the earlier distinction between male and female speakers instituted with the acquisition of language, is confirmed.¹¹ The young girl thus becomes a "member of society" when she first acquires language. Since the symbolic order is predicated on the displacing of nature, it is from the time of the acquisition of speech that she is required to abdicate her sense of nature as a "kingdom".

Rebekah's childhood experience of nature in "The Child's Day" represents, in the form of an allegory, the effect for women of this displacement of nature. It is therefore interesting that Schreiner referred to the Prelude in a letter to Francis Smith as "a picture in small, a kind of allegory, of the life of the woman in the book" (qtd. in Clayton Olive Schreiner 126). For what the "picture in small" captures is the central concern within Schreiner's work: the problematic relation of women and nature and how this relation works to marginalise them within culture.

For the eight-year-old Rebekah it does seem, at first, that nature represents "her kingdom as a whole". On the day when Bertie is born, she escapes from the oppressive stillness of the house by going to the orchard where she imagines herself sailing to an island and living there alone. The island is literally Rebekah's kingdom in that it is given to her by Queen Victoria as a place where she may reign as sovereign subject. "No one will ever scold you here," the Queen tells her, "and you can do just as you like" (45). The island also represents Rebekah's "kingdom" since the house she discovers is scaled down to her own size. It is truly her "proper place" in that "The doors were just high enough for her to go in and out at, and all things fitted her" (46). The baby she discovers on the island, lying inside a snow-white pod, is also both a gift from nature, and one that is in proportion to her own body.

In the story that Rebekah tells her imaginary baby the natural world figures even more explicitly as an Edenic kingdom. The child adventurer of the story, wandering alone through the bush, encounters various animals: a cock-o-veet lays an egg in her hand and promises her the hatched chick; monkeys invite her for tea; a lion and a tiger both play with her and protect her; and a puff adder shows her its babies. The human and natural world not only co-exist peacefully, but are also united in a reciprocal relation, since the child gives as freely to the animals as she receives from them. She shares her food with them, offers to remove a thorn from the lion's paw, and provides the cobra with the warmth of her pinafore. At this point, however - with the child singing the cobra to sleep in her lap — Rebekah's vision of an innocent natural world breaks down. "And that's the end of the story," she states abruptly (52). She can neither continue the story, nor assert its status as anything but pure fantasy:

"You know it's only a story, my baby. You can't really go into the bush and do so with all the animals." (52)

It is significant that it is the child's encounter with the cobra that causes Rebekah's vision of an ideal unity between woman and nature to falter, and finally to be denied as a possibility. As a child of three, Rebekah had carried a snake home in her pinafore as "a great treasure", but had been punished for doing so (62). Since culture can only exist by virtue of its control over nature, those who subvert its mastery, blurring the distinctions between nature and culture (as Rebekah does when she brings the snake from the bush into the domestic world of the farmhouse), must themselves be controlled. The necessity for such control is intensified in Rebekah's case, since in the colonial context the alien land continually throws into question culture's dominance over nature. In this sense, then, Rebekah's punishment symbolises the dominance of culture over nature that is necessary to the very existence of culture. In another sense, though, it indicates how accession to the Symbolic Order of language is made possible through the imposition of such control. It is by being punished that Rebekah learns not only the word or name "snake", but also the cultural connotations associated with it:

she understood what they [snakes] were, she was not afraid of them, but they had become a nightmare to her. They spoiled her world. (62)

Exactly how the snake "spoils" Rebekah's world becomes apparent when she sees a real cobra in the orchard. Although she is not afraid of it, and is fascinated by its colouring, she "gazed at it in fixed horror, motionless", since she recognises the Symbolic Law of culture:

According to rule, she should have gone to the house and called people to look for it and kill it. (62)

Caught between her conflicting feelings, Rebekah runs from the orchard but tells no one about the snake. Having transgressed the Law of culture yet again, she feels "abandonedly wicked", and "as if

she herself were a snake and had gone krinkle! krinkle! krinkle! over the grass" (62). Thus, Rebekah not only feels that she is associated with nature, but also that she embodies within herself specifically those negative attributes of nature that culture has taught her must be controlled and destroyed. As a phallic symbol, a symbol of the Law and Power of the Father, the snake further underlines the imposition of the Symbolic Law of the Father. If Rebekah is excluded from culture in disobeying its laws, then the intrusion of the cultural symbolism of the snake, if only in her memory as she watches it in the orchard, no longer makes nature a refuge for her, but rather literally exiles her from it as she runs from the snake back to the farmhouse. Similarly, the memory of her experience with the real cobra intrudes upon and disturbs even her imaginary kingdom, making her assert that any union with nature is pure fiction, "only a story".

The problem of nature as a metaphor for women writers that is denied in Jones' account, but which is graphically illustrated by Rebekah's story, is that "nature" is itself a term within culture. As such, it is bound up with all the negative cultural associations for women that women writers would wish to reject, but which are so pervasive as to render this rejection almost impossible. In From Man to Man, for example, Schreiner exposes the debilitating effects of the association of women and nature in the case of Bertie and Rebekah, but projects onto Griet, the "Hottentot" girl that Bertie adopts, precisely such an association with nature. Griet is portrayed as "a little untaught savage" (104), but she is equally presented as a "seer". She perceives John-Ferdinand, for example, as an intruder on the farm whose presence places Bertie in danger. She is also the only person who sees through Veronica's attempt to take Bertie's place on the farm, and she actively subverts Veronica's attempts, working with and through nature in doing so.

She cuts the stems of Veronica's flowers, for example, thus ensuring that they wither and die, puts garlic in her bread so that it will not rise, and tries to frighten her by placing a toad in her bath water (143-4, 127). Griet's insight, moreover, is portrayed as the direct result of her affinity with nature, since she is able to sense the arrival of visitors to the farm in the same way as

for all the long generations of the past her foremothers had listened on the great pathless plains for the coming step of the antelope that meant food, or for the enemy that meant war - death. (342)

This apparently favourable presentation of Griet as a "little untaught savage" reveals the limits of Schreiner's critique of colonialism, and the same blindness to racial stereotypes that Rebekah demonstrates in her journal when she asks:

Who shall say that, in destroying the child of nature with his perhaps simpler organisation and untried nerves, we are not destroying that of which humanity may yet in the aeons to come have need to keep the race upon the earth. (205-6)

Despite problems such as these, Schreiner's exposure of the limitations enforced on women by virtue of their association with nature remains important. This is particularly so given the current celebration of women's difference specifically in terms of their closer association with nature and with the body, under the growing influence of French theories of the feminine. What unites French feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva is their theorising of feminine specificity in terms of a spatial proximity.¹² For Irigaray, the woman's body represents a constant relation of self to itself, an auto-eroticism that renders any possession of an other as "other" antithetical to "woman":

Nearness, however, is not foreign to woman, a nearness so close that any identification of one or the other, and therefore any notion of property is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is so near she cannot possess it any more than she can possess herself. ("This Sex Which Is Not One" 104-105)

Thus as Cixous states in "The Laugh of the Medusa", "More so than

men who are coaxed towards social success, toward sublimation, women are body" (257).

In its elaboration of femininity as a body overwhelmingly present-to-itself, the work of French feminisms indicates the place assigned to women within culture, even as its tendency towards an essentialist view of woman obscures such a recognition. "The masculine can partly look at itself, speculate about itself, represent itself and describe itself for what it is," states Irigaray, whilst the feminine "cannot describe itself from the outside or in formal terms, except by identifying itself with the masculine, thus by losing itself" (qtd. in Doane 80). So close to her body, "woman" is thus assigned a problematic position in relation to structures of seeing and the visible, and, since spatial distance is translated into a temporal distance in the service of knowledge, to culture itself.

The importance of Schreiner's work lies not only in identifying this problematic relation as the result of the social construction of "woman", rather than as the function of the essence of women. Her work also indicates how the exclusion of women from culture is the result of the impossible position to which "woman" is assigned within patriarchal discourse: as an image and symbol of immanence, a sign within language, the object of both artistic exchange and cultural exchange in marriage, and bearer rather than controller of culture. The definition of "woman" as a body so close to itself is further identified in Schreiner's writing as the reason for the denigration of women's activities within culture. Since the degree of civilisation is measured by the distance from the body, those forms of creativity which depend on the sense of contact are devalued in culture's terms.¹³ Thus, the work of Bertie and Rebekah within the domestic context goes unrecognised, while Bertie's role as mediator between nature and culture in particular is marginalised

within culture.

While Schreiner's critique of women's association with nature thus prevents any celebration of difference because of the status accorded this difference within culture, her writing is informed by the same vision of a different position of women within the real and the symbolic that informs the work of French feminisms. For if her critique of women's association with nature illustrates the ways in which women are "branded" by the social construction of "woman",
* then in her re-definition of culture she seeks to realise Lyndall's dream of a future possibility: that "if I might but be one of those born in the future; then, perhaps, to be born a woman will not be to
* be born branded" (137).

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. The position of women writers, and their treatment within the dominant literary tradition, is emblematic of women's position within culture as a whole. Solely responsible for child care and domestic duties, and often having to work outside the home to maintain the family, women are prohibited from writing full-time; when they do manage to write, their work is disparaged as "private" expression (women's letters or journals, for example), or a variety of arguments are invoked to dismiss the status of their writing as "literature". See Olsen for the circumstances which obstruct or silence women's creation, and Russ for the strategies used to deny women's authorship.
2. From Jacques Lacan's statement "~~The~~ woman does not exist", quoted by Rose in her introduction to Feminine Sexuality. As Rose notes, the point is "not that women do not exist, but that her status as an absolute category and guarantor^a of fantasy (exactly The woman) is false (~~The~~)". (48)
3. For the way in which "woman" is constructed as a sexual object in systems of cultural representation, see Mulvey, and for the way in which the female body is subjected, in terms of this process of sexualisation, to the constant demand to arouse desire, see Haug. For way in which the eroticization of women is structured in terms of a male gaze, see E. Ann Kaplan.
4. See Cowie for both the idea of woman as sign, and for an account of how kinship systems work to produce woman as sign, and to place both men and women in position in society.
5. My concept of "woman" as the "mark of difference that divides" draws on Dorothy Driver's argument in "Woman as Sign in the South African Colonial Enterprise", in which she extends the notion of

women as mediators, arguing that women "are mediators also in the sense that they divide into two parts the two racial categories, as the Latin mediare further suggests".

6. The idea of "woman" as support for systems of representation is most clearly articulated in feminist film theory, where it is used to account for the prominence of images of woman within cinema, and for the simultaneous exclusion of women from a position as spectator of the cinematic. See Rose, Sexuality in the Field of Vision (199-213); Doane; and De Lauretis (137-57).

7. Frank's comments speak of a similar view of nature as a place beyond the laws and norms of civilisation. He agrees to be married by a magistrate, for example, because "it did not matter in the country where no one knew what you did" (80). His son repeats this view, refusing to ^{be} seen with Sartje, the "coloured" child adopted by Rebekah, "in the main road or on the road to the station", and only agreeing to walk with her "in the pine woods or somewhere where people can't see me" (440).

8. Kolodny "Honing a Habitable Languagescape" 201. See also Kolodny The Land Before Her (35-54).

9. Rive claims that publication of Undine did nothing to enhance Schreiner's reputation, and maintains that D.L. Hobman "rightly dismisses the work as 'an immature and very ill constructed book with a distinctly novelettish flavour'" ("An Infinite Compassion" 30), while to Friedmann, Undine is "undeniably poor stuff" (1).

10. See Gilman "Black Bodies, White Bodies" for an analysis of how the prostitute and the black female are similarly represented in the nineteenth-century as the embodiment of excessive and "unnatural" sexuality that is associated with pollution, disease and physical abnormality.

11. See Cora Kaplan (69-93) for an analysis of women's relation to language which, although drawing on the Lacanian theory of women's

negative entry into culture, extends this analysis in a discussion of the rupture between childhood and adolescence, when, in western societies, public speech is a male privilege and women's speech restricted by custom in mixed sex gatherings or, if permitted, is still characterised by its private nature.

12. For a critique of the elaboration of femininity in terms of spatial proximity, see Doane; and for a more general analysis of French feminist theory, see Ann Rosalind Jones.

13. As Metz argues, the social hierarchy of the senses means that the main socially acceptable arts are those which are based on the senses at a distance, whereas "those which depend on the senses of contact are often regarded as 'minor' arts: (culinary arts, arts of perfumes etc.)" (60).

CHAPTER THREE

TOWARDS A REDEFINITION OF CULTURE

The redefinition of culture that emerges in Olive Schreiner's writing challenges the social meaning and implications of women's association with nature in three distinct ways. In demanding access for women to work and education, Schreiner rejects the definition of "woman" as passive and dependent, just as she refuses the domestic sphere as the only "proper place" for women. This demand is itself predicated on two notions of culture which further challenge the marginality of women within culture. Women have a right to "honoured and socially useful human toil" (Woman and Labour 68), Schreiner argues, because their traditional domestic labour formed the historical foundation of culture itself, while their crucial role as mothers in ensuring the continuation of civilisation demands that they have access to the broadest education and a "many-sided, multiform culture" (African Farm 181). Thus in emphasising the work of women as mothers and in celebrating the creativity of their domestic work, Schreiner reclaims a specifically female domestic culture, usually denigrated "private" or "personal", as essential to the very existence of culture and society. Her demand for "new fields of labour and a reconstruction of our relationship with life" (Woman and Labour 74) is also founded upon a re-evaluation of sexual difference, the primary distinction on which culture itself is based. Sexual difference, Schreiner argues, is primarily a convention and social construct and as such it "is not a sound basis for classification in any but purely sexual matters".¹ Schreiner's concern, then, is to limit the meaning and scope of difference: to expose the definition of "woman" as bearer rather than possessor of culture to be a means of ensuring women's continued inferiority, rather than the "natural" or logical

extension of their specialised role in reproduction. Schreiner's redefinition of culture is thus founded upon and demands the recognition of both sexual difference and sexual equality even as it exposes the metaphysical nature of all gender identities and tries to imagine a culture not founded on binary oppositions such as masculinity and femininity.

Each strand of Schreiner's redefinition is beset by a number of contradictions, while the relation between her "theory" of an alternative culture, as expressed in both Woman and Labour and in the "theoretical interpolations" in her novels, and its fictional representation, the story that the narratives themselves tell, is marked by further strains and tensions. Within Schreiner criticism such contradictions are usually seen as a symptom of her inability to integrate theory and practice, and thus as another facet of her "failure". First and Scott, for example, argue that:

there remained a gap between her demands for women's rights and her overwhelming sense of her wrongs; somehow she could not throw off her sense of personal oppression.
(333)

Implicit in this comment is the suggestion of failure as a special-case inability; a moment to be regretted in the development of a unified, non-contradictory self. Yet if we are to take seriously the premise of psychoanalysis - that there is no continuity in psychic life, no stable sexual identity, and no position for men or women that is ever simply achieved - then there is no way in which Schreiner could simply "throw off her sense of personal oppression". At the same time, though, it is precisely the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious that allows for the very possibility of cultural struggle. As the place where identity is endlessly remodelled and endlessly breaks, the unconscious constantly attests to the failure of identity: "failure" understood as what Jacqueline Rose terms "a * resistance to identity which lies at the very heart of psychic life", and which makes it "more than a fact of individual pathology

that most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all" ("Femininity and Its Discontents" 184). While fully recognising the inconsistencies in Schreiner's attempt to redefine culture, my primary concern will be to retain a specifically psychoanalytic sense of failure, and to stress the crucial role of contradiction in motivating Schreiner's on-going attempt to change radically the position of women within culture.

The Rejection of Patriarchal Culture

In Woman and Labour, Schreiner denounces the marginality of women within culture by demanding their access to positions within society which allow for their definitive contribution as the active agents of culture:

From the judge's seat to the legislator's chair; from the statesman's closet to the merchant's office; from the chemist's laboratory to the astronomer's tower, there is no post or form of toil for which it is not our intention to attempt to fit ourselves; and there is no closed door we do not intend to force open; and there is no fruit in the garden of knowledge it is not our determination to eat. (167)

The argument of Woman and Labour has been seen as "rhetorical" in that it deliberately minimises the extent to which women were already involved in industry so as to strengthen the case for their greater access to work; or as one which is derived from an analysis of conditions in South Africa, where women's activities were severely confined to domestic duties, and inappropriately applied to the position of women in Britain (First and Scott 274, 283). By the late nineteenth century both industrialisation and feminist agitation for work and education had significantly altered the position of women in Britain. As Martha Vicinus demonstrates in Independent Women, however, the lives of late Victorian "significant sisters" were marked by a paradox of "power and marginality, of enormous strengths within narrow limits, of unity and support linked

with division and doubt" (9). Tensions such as these reflect the ambiguous nature of changes in the material conditions of women's lives. For while the period did see women's increased participation in industry, it was largely working-class women who were drawn into wage labour and were forced to face the double burden of domestic and factory labour. For middle-class women, industrialisation helped to reinforce the separate spheres doctrine. As wives and mothers, they were granted power within the carefully delimited sphere of the home, but only on the grounds that their "feminine sensibility" made them alone capable of child care and domestic responsibilities, and in such a way that a compensatory ideal of domesticity masked their exclusion from political, economic and social power.

Far from ignoring such problems, it is precisely these effects of industrialisation for women that Schreiner attempts to challenge in Woman and Labour. Her argument for women's right to education is designed to combat the enforced position of middle-class women as passive and dependent. The importance of Woman and Labour in this regard is evident in that it became the "Bible of the Women's Movement" for early twentieth-century feminists such as Vera Brittain, who wrote in 1933 of how she could "still tingle with the excitement of the passage which reinforced me, brought up as were nearly all middle-class girls of that period to believe myself predestined to a perpetual, distasteful but inevitable tutelage, in my determination to go to college and at least prepare for a type of life more adequate than that of a Buxton young lady: 'We take all labour for our province!'" (qtd. in First and Scott 265).

Yet Schreiner's demands are also aimed at changing the existing position of women in labour: their restriction to the least paid and most unskilled work. The man who objects to women's access to work, Schreiner argues, is not concerned with the type or amount of labour

that women undertake. "It is not the woman, who, on hands and knees, at tenpence a day, scrubs the floors of the public buildings, or private dwellings, that fills him with anguish for womanhood: that somewhat quadrupedal position is for him truly feminine" (204). Rather, it is specifically the economic independence of women that would result from their working "that interferes with his ideal of the eternal womanly":

he is as a rule quite contented that the women of the race should labour for him, whether as tea-pickers or as washerwomen, or toilers for the children he brings into the world, provided the reward they receive is not large, nor in such fields as he might himself at any time desire to enter. (204-5)

Rejecting women's restriction to such menial positions, Schreiner's demand for women's right to education works to ensure that wherever the impact of industrialisation is felt women are able to take their place as "controllers, guiders and possessors" (71).

What is problematic in Woman and Labour, however, is Schreiner's tendency to assert access to education and public work as sufficient in itself to end the "branding" of women as marginal to culture. Her insistent demand is for "free trade in labour and equality of training" (166); a demand which speaks of an "economic freemarket" belief in the (absolute) equalising effects of access to the "public" world alone.² What is more disturbing is Schreiner's appeal to the "natural" in support of her argument, especially since such appeals are traditionally invoked to justify and legitimate social inequality and division. Schreiner rejects the restriction of women's activities on the grounds of their supposed "inherent mental incapacity" (219), for example, by demanding that "natural conditions, inexorably, but beneficently may determine the labours of each individual, and not artificial restrictions" (166, my emphasis). "All we demand," she states, is for "all to start from the one point in the world of intellectual culture and labour, with our ancient Mother Nature sitting as umpire, distributing the prizes

and scratching from the lists the incompetent" (167). Schreiner's belief in the equalising power of education thus leads her to appeal to a benevolent "ancient Mother Nature" as the sole arbiter of women's success or failure within culture: a strange choice of image given her fictional emphasis on women's marginal position within culture as founded on their association with "Mother Nature".

The story of Schreiner's novels is in fact one that tells insistently of the limits of the "equal access" argument of Woman and Labour. Undine, Lyndall and Rebekah are all self-educated and thus able to achieve varying degrees of freedom from their socially defined roles as women. Their "freedom", however, remains severely constrained and extremely tenuous. When Undine arrives at the diamond fields, for example, the narrator comments:

Now she had broken through conventional restraints and was free - free to feel that a woman is a poor thing carrying in herself the bands that bind her. Now she was free, but how to extract enjoyment from the present state of things was more than she could accomplish at that instant; and how long would she be able to maintain herself without getting under some one's thumb? (245, my emphasis)

Having internalised social perceptions of herself as inferior, then, Undine feels herself only "a poor thing": a self-image which works against her effectively challenging her subordinate status. Undine thus reinforces her own marginality within culture, illustrating again Schreiner's concern with the social construction of gendered subjectivity - with how social constructions of "woman" are at once "made" and also ^{come to} inhere in women's own perception of themselves and of their abilities.

Lyndall's fatalism provides the most striking example of women's subjective subordination. After her impassioned defence of women's right to work, she comments:

"But what does it help? A little bitterness, a little longing when we are young, a little futile searching for work, a little passionate striving for room for the exercise of our powers, - and then we go with the drove. A woman must march with her regiment. In the end she must

be trodden down or go with it; and if she is wise she goes". (177)

Despite her incisive arguments against the "branding" of women as marginal to culture, Lyndall denies her own ability to change their cultural fate. When Waldo asks why she does not attempt to bring about her vision of a "new age" of social and sexual relations, she replies: "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" (183). Lyndall's disbelief in her ability to effect change by herself indicates both the strength of women's socialisation into dependence and their own subjective attraction to a dependent position. As a position which carries with it the promise of a "saviour", an ideal which compensates for their compliance with the norms of femininity, dependency elicits women's "consent" to their own subordination.

Both Undine's and Rebekah's comments are marked by a similar conflict between a desire for independence and self-affirmation, and for the rewards of femininity. Punished for disregarding the rules of femininity, Undine longs for the "glorious time when she would be a woman and would know everything and be loved by everyone, and when she would be free" (20). Rebekah is caught between equally conflicting desires, as her letter to Frank indicates. She demands an absolute equality and openness in their relations: "I do not ask you to love me, only to speak the truth to me, as you would if I were another man" (298). Only a few paragraphs later, however, her letter speaks of her total dependence on Frank:

"O Frank, my love, my husband, please help me! I want to do what is right and I cannot see the way! I am like a little child that has lost its way in the wood and it is dark everywhere. Oh, please take my hand and help me. You are much stronger than I; you are the only human being who can help me." (298)

It is of course women's "consent" or necessary submission to a passive feminine position that Schreiner's demand for "labour and

the training that fits us for labour" aims to combat (Woman and Labour 283). Without access to education and work, Schreiner argues, women are compelled to exist through "the passive performance of sex functions alone" (71), and are thus forced into a position of "sex parasitism": a particularly insidious form of inactivity which results in a decline in vitality and intelligence (78). In her attempt to develop a materialist account of women's oppression in Woman and Labour, Schreiner argues that female parasitism becomes dominant when the material wealth of a certain civilisation renders women's physical labour unnecessary. Parasitism is therefore enabled by the oppression of other social groups "either as slaves, subject races or classes", since this allows for the accumulation of wealth by the dominant race or class:

It has invariably been by feeding on this wealth, the result of forced or ill-paid labour, that the female of the dominant class or race has in the past lost her activity and has come to exist purely through the passive performance of her sexual functions. (98)

The concept of female parasitism thus illustrates Schreiner's attempt to integrate her feminism, her socialism and her rejection of colonialist, racist exploitation. It is an attempt, however, that clearly retains elements of class and race prejudice. The reference to the "incompetence" of the "sex parasite" in failing to provide both physical care and the proper "mental atmosphere" for her children (108) tends to slide, for example, into a certain condescension to working-class women. At the same time, however, Schreiner's fiction represents the working-class woman as one whose inherent dignity renders her absence of wealth enviable. Undine is "filled with admiration", for example, for Alice Brown's aloofness (99-100), and envies Alice "her disgrace, her baby, and her rags" (192). Although relations between the two women illustrate the pervasive intellectual and cultural emptiness of Undine's life as the rich wife of George Blair, the distance between character and

narrator tends to be lost at times, almost as if Schreiner herself endorsed Alice Brown's fate as "better" than Undine's. Alice's child is "the child of love", unlike Undine's child, a child of "loathing" (192), while Alice, despite being ostracised as a "wicked woman", is "proud" and defiant" (191) unlike Undine who, in her complete submission to Albert's will, is described as "a human dog" (146).

The simultaneous condescension and romanticising of "other" women, or women as "other", which emerges in Schreiner's account of female parasitism is most evident in her discussion of prostitution. For Schreiner, prostitution was fundamentally related to the more general phenomenon of female parasitism, and could not be adequately understood unless this relation was fully recognised:

It is the failure to do this that leaves so painful a sense of abortion on the mind, after listening to most modern utterances on the question, whether made from the emotional platform of the moral reformer, or the intellectual platform of the would-be scientist. We are left with the feeling that the matter has been handled but not dealt with: the knife has not reached the core.
(Woman and Labour 83)

Thus Schreiner distances herself both from the mid-Victorian "social purity" campaign that served middle-class values and helped bolster the family, and from members of the Men and Women's Club, to which she belonged, who sought to develop an "objective" analysis of the "social evil" through a scientific discourse that denied women's subjective experience and over which they had uncertain command.³ In stressing women's own participation in structures oppressive to them, as much as in her assertion of women's sexual desire and their right to sexual pleasure, she also departs from the mainstream feminist campaign against prostitution, which, as Judith Walkowitz argues in "Male Vice and Female Virtue", tended to reinforce a "separate sphere" ideology which emphasised women's purity, moral supremacy and domestic virtues (57).

Yet in her descriptions of the prostitutes she encountered

Schreiner perpetuates the contemporary image of the prostitute as a innocent child victim.⁴ Writing to Karl Pearson in 1886, she tells of how she spent the day with a prostitute, "a woman with sweet blue eyes and a lovable bright child's face" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 108). Although she comments on the woman's "keenly analytical mind", this perception of the prostitute is lost in the frequent allusions to the childishness of the woman:

These women are just like big children, you know, they have such a strange, passionate love for flowers: she ran about and picked them with a joy hardly any grown-up person has" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 109).

* In viewing the prostitute as an innocent child, Schreiner's letter speaks of the contradictions and tensions at the heart of the mid-Victorian feminist campaign against prostitution. As Walkowitz has argued, in asserting their right to defend prostitutes as "mothers" and "sisters", feminists invoked "an authority relationship between older middle-class women and younger working-class women that was hierarchical and custodial as well as caring and protective" ("Male Vice and Female Virtue" 45). Although designed to empower women, the feminist campaign to protect prostitutes often involved a denial of the social and economic autonomy that prostitution did provide for working-class women whose move into prostitution was not always the result of middle-class seduction or betrayal, as the dominant Victorian representation claimed, but rather, as Walkowitz argues in Prostitution and Victorian Society, often voluntary, gradual and temporary: a "refuge from uneasy ^ucircumstances" for young women who had to choose _from a number of unpleasant alternatives (24). More significantly, though, the focus on child prostitution helped to institute repressive and coercive legislation which effectively destroyed the brothel as a centre of a specific female subculture, further undermined the economic independence of prostitutes and increasingly rendered them social outcasts (Walkowitz "Male Vice and

Female Virtue" 51).

Schreiner's representation of black women lays itself open to a similar appropriation. Her critique of parasitism leads her to valorise black women as representatives of an ideal of motherhood no longer respected by European women. While Schreiner thus departs from the contemporary denigration of black women, her celebration of their "difference" tends to deny the oppression of black women that is legitimated in the name of that difference. Perceived as doubly "closer to nature" in terms of the binary oppositions through which culture is ordered, black women are presumed to be especially suited to domestic labour, and their predominance in the least paid form of work thereby justified. In South Africa, black domestic workers are often the primary agents of socialisation within white homes: taking the place of the mother in many respects, they nevertheless remain servants; separated from their own families by the migrant labour system, their long working hours prevent them caring for their own children. While domestic service continues to be one of the largest sources of employment for black women in South Africa today, it was often the only form of work available to black women in the early twentieth-century.⁵ In such a context, Schreiner's valorising of black women's "natural" role as mothers provides support for their continued oppression as domestic workers.

In her fiction, Schreiner also obscures the extent to which the domestic work of black women made white women organisers and administrators, rather than actual domestic workers, within the South African family. In From Man to Man, for example, Rebekah is presented as doing most of the work in her house in Cape Town, in a way that negates the work of the domestic servants she does in fact employ. Rebekah, we are told, "had only one little coloured maid to help her" and was "too busy with her household work and children" to spend time with Bertie (149). The very presence of black women in

the colonial domestic context is erased in that both Rebekah's "little coloured maid" and "old Ayah" are never specifically named in the novel. Schreiner's blindness to the role of black women as domestic workers is further evident in that both Undine's and Bertie's declines into parasitism occur in England, and not in South Africa, where the availability of cheap domestic labour would be far more conducive to the emergence of the leisured parasite.

Yet if Schreiner's fiction points to the limitations of her attempt to integrate her feminism and anti-racism in the notion of female parasitism, it also suggests a potentially more radical notion of parasitism than does Woman and Labour. In Schreiner's novels, it is not simply the "effete wife, concubine, or prostitute, clad in fine raiment, the work of others' fingers; fed on luxurious viands, the result of others' toil, waited on and tended by the labour of others" (Woman and Labour 81) who is portrayed as the female parasite. Rather, parasitism is shown as an ever-present threat for all women, and an even greater danger for those women who do manage to gain access to culture.

Bertie represents the most extreme example of female parasitism in Schreiner's novels. As sexual object and site of men's sexual desires, she is seen as unsuited to any form of work in a way that reinforces her total dependence on her sexuality. When she asks "the Jew" to help her find work at the diamond fields, for example, he replies: "Ze Fields is not ze place for you! You are for ze joy, ze life, ze beautiful clothes, ze beautiful zings: you are not for ze hard work!" (337). Debarred from any form of activity, Bertie exhibits the "complete enervation" that Schreiner identifies as the characteristic of the sexual parasite (Woman and Labour 82). When she stays with Rebekah, she declines into a state of apathy, having "no wish to see the people and the sights of the town", and wearing "one white dress till it was frowsy and tumbled" (149). In London,

she spends her time sleeping or lying on the sofa, has recurrent fits of "wild crying" (367), and finds her only activity in rearranging the furniture. When she asks a London landlady about obtaining work, she is confronted with the impossibility of her request, and with the suggestion that prostitution is her only alternative:

The woman looked keenly at her. "Well, you'd get nothing to do in those clothes; you'd have to get something quite different" (403-4).

Undine differs markedly from Bertie in her greater control over her life, yet she too suffers a "decline" remarkably similar to Bertie's parasitism. After being rejected by Albert Blair, Undine becomes lethargic, lying "as still as a corpse" under a tree in the garden all day (171). She abandons all her previous interests: she never reads, she gives her sewing to Nancy, and finds no meaning in her writing:

They had lifted her up to heaven when she wrote them; now they were bits of blue paper, scribbled over and blotted, and she would put them away listlessly without ever looking at them. (172)

Her very physical appearance speaks of her mental apathy. Nancy tells her lover, for example, of how Undine walks "with her arms a-hanging down at each side of her ... and her head a-lying sort of loose like on her chest, as though she'd gone and got her neck broken" (171).

Undine's inactivity and her inability to think and feel are reinforced in her marriage to George Blair. Immediately after the wedding, she is represented quite explicitly as the sexual parasite:

In a richly furnished apartment, enveloped in a soft cloud of white lace and delicate azure ribbons, sat Undine Blair. Diamonds glittered in her hair and her little jewelled fingers strayed listlessly over the leaves of paper before her. (183)

The effect of this transformation is to further rob her of any vitality. She grows "quieter, colder, but more passive and

submissive every week"; whatever George Blair's request, Undine's obedience "was equally absolute, unquestioning and lifeless" (185-6). Thus Undine's inability to act on her freedom at the diamond fields is not simply due to her internalisation of the norms of feminine behaviour, but also due to her particular experience of sex parasitism. If she were a man, the narrator comments, she "might have thrown off her jacket and set to work instantly":

As it was, being only a woman and a fine little lady with the scent not yet out of her hair nor the softness rubbed from her hands, she stood there in the street, feeling very weak, bodily, after her illness, and mentally, after her long life of servitude and dependence - very weak and very heartsick. (245-6, my emphasis)

Although Rebekah and Lyndall are clearly not represented as female parasites, they do experience periods of utter mental and physical exhaustion which have no apparent explanation. When Frank ignores Rebekah's demand that the nature of their marriage change, she suffers an inexplicable illness, becoming so sick that "her life had been despaired of" (311). Lyndall's death is also represented as the result of a curious "decline". She becomes ill after sitting in the rain beside her child's grave, and finds relief from pain only in the moments before her death:

Through these months of anguish a mist had rested on her mind; it was rolled together now, and the old clear intellect arose from its long torpor. (264)

The lives of Schreiner's central female characters thus indicate that parasitism, far from being only the effect of a certain congruence of historical and social conditions, is an ever present threat for all women. Not only are women socialised into dependence, but their growing awareness of their own immobility and disadvantage may either precipitate an emotional crisis thus forcing them into a powerless position, or it may ensure their more direct acceptance of the passive feminine position. As Lyndall tells Waldo, the double-edged "advantage" of being a woman is that:

we can at any time step into ease and competence, where

you 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. (178)

Women who do gain access to culture are even more susceptible to the attraction of dependency. In having to refuse their "natural" humanising role, they must necessarily "steel" themselves against all emotions regarded as "feminine": sympathy, gentleness, and affection. The resulting sense of isolation and guilt that they experience renders them all the more prone to the ideology of romantic love: precisely that which reinforces their dependence on men, and robs them of the possibility of an independent life. Undine, for example, is compulsively attracted to Albert, although the reasons for her attraction remain a complete mystery to her:

Why in this man's presence was she bowed down, wishing only to do and say what he might approve? Others might ridicule her dress, her manners, her tastes, and she would cling to them with the greater tenacity; but if a line deepened around this man's mouth, she would have given untold treasure to be able to alter or disclaim them. (128)

Rather than being truly incomprehensible, Undine's attraction to men is portrayed as a type of "madness" precisely because of its intense subjective power and psychical significance.⁶ For what Albert promises Undine is both material support and psychic security. While Undine fully recognises the illusory nature of her ideal, knowing with "silent though not less abiding conviction" that Albert "would never come near her, they would never meet" (146), her ideal is all the more powerful precisely because of its status as fantasy. As Jacqueline Rose argues, the psychoanalytic category of fantasy designates "a dimension of reality all the more important for the subject because it goes way beyond anything that can or needs to be, attested by fact" (Rose 1986 13). Undine's fantasy of an idealised union with Albert thus illustrates how she participates in the oppressive structure of romantic love, at the same time as it

indicates, in pointing to her intense loneliness, that she is not the sole agent of her own oppression.

Women's struggle to gain entry into culture leads not only to their denying the feminine in themselves, but equally to their disparaging of other women. When Undine fulfils Albert's ideal of a "womanly woman" and mends her torn glove, for example, she berates herself for doing so:

"What a contemptible little wretch I am becoming!" she thought when she had finished it, "to allow such trivialities to break into my real life and drive out higher thought. Am I no better than other women after all? I've no heart; if I lose my head what is to become of me?" She felt weary of herself and disgusted, and she could not now lie down on the floor and pray, till in an agony or an ecstasy, she should forget herself. (108)

Undine's disgust with her own submission translates into a fear that she is "no better than other women" in a way which suggests that women's struggle to gain access to culture works to ensure their competition, rather than their mutual co-operation. Schreiner's own ambivalent attitude to Undine's giving way to the feminine is evident in her comments after Undine receives proposals from Harry and George Blair:

Passing out at the door, she caught sight of her own face in the little glass that hung on the opposite wall, and for the first time that morning a womanly, or in justice let us say a human, feeling of pleasure came to her. (123-4)

Schreiner's disparaging of the "womanly woman" is equally apparent elsewhere in Undine and in her other novels. Undine's governess, for example, is described as someone whose "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" (13); Mrs Snappercapps is depicted as a woman "who envied her white-handed soft-voiced little dependent [Undine] as one feminine thing envies another" (253); and both Veronica and Mrs Drummond in From Man to Man are portrayed as jealous and envious of Bertie and Rebekah, and

as calculatingly trying to usurp their positions.

Schreiner is even more explicit in her denigration of "other women" in her letters. Writing to Edward Carpenter, she comments that "it's not men that trouble one, it's middle-class women that are so hard to reconcile with a good god" (qtd. in Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 165). Her letters are also marked by a certain distaste at being a woman and by her longing to be a man, echoing both Rebekah's dream of how "nice it would be to be a man" (226), and Undine's comment that "I wish I was not a woman. I hate women; they are horrible and disgusting, and I wish I had never been born rather than to be one" (49).⁷

Marion Friedmann has pointed to the prevalence of the sinister older woman figures in Schreiner's novels, arguing that such figures express her unresolved and repressed hatred for her mother (41). The prevalence of equally sinister, conspiring and jealous younger women in Schreiner's fiction suggests another level of conflict, however: a conflict between the "strong" and "weak" aspects of her own nature. Women such as Lyndall and Rebekah who fight for their equality, and women like Em and Bertie who accept their subordinate social positions, never questioning their subjection, are together representative of the conflictual position of women, who, like Schreiner, do gain access to culture. What the presence of "weaker" women in Schreiner's fiction suggests, then, is the need to project onto other social groups (the "incompetent" working class mother, the female parasite and prostitute) those "bad" aspects of female subjectivity that must be rejected by the strong, assertive and self-defining woman.

Such projection is most evident in the description of the sexual parasite in Woman and Labour. The female parasite is the woman "seeking madly by pursuit of pleasure and sensuality to fill the void left by the lack of honourable activity; accepting lust in

the place of love, ease in the place of exertion, and an unlimited consumption in the place of production" (91). The parasite thus becomes the site of female sexual desire: that which, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Esther Newton demonstrate, had to be rejected by the "new woman" in favour of her social and economic independence (qtd. in Walkowitz "Male Vice and Female Virtue" 53). What is lost in this description is Schreiner's critique of heterosexual relations as dominated by the "sex-purchasing power of the male", as well as the legitimacy she accords female sexual pleasure. Instead, her accounts of the female parasite express a fundamental antagonism to the sexual, exaggerate the importance of the sensual in women's everyday lives, and stigmatise women's love of pleasure as the sign of their degradation. There is thus a slippage into reactionary views of women, into images of women "like the field tick" (78), which locate disease and decay within women's sexual being, rather than in socially constructed sexual practices.⁸

This is not to suggest that the notion of female parasitism amounts only to Schreiner's projection onto other women ^{of} elements of female subjectivity which she found impossible to reconcile with her ideal of the "new woman". Her constant interest in the phenomenon of parasitism does speak her own anxieties, while her near obsession with prostitution seems to suggest her own identification with the figure of the prostitute.⁹ Havelock Ellis' case history of Schreiner reveals her terror of sexual involvement and how it made her feel like a prostitute (First and Scott 132), while a letter to Ellis in 1889, in which Schreiner appears to recall her relationship with Julius Gau, speaks most clearly of her fears of sexuality and of her overriding sense of guilt, telling of how people who knew of the incident with Gau taunted her, asking her the meaning of the word "pickpocket", a slang term for prostitute.¹⁰ To argue that Schreiner "had great difficulty in accepting her own sexuality"

(First and Scott 140), however, is to assume that sexuality itself is unproblematic, rather than inevitably troubled, flawed, and conflictual. The discourse of sexuality in Schreiner's work points to her struggle to break free from prevailing ideas about female sexuality; an attempt which nevertheless remains imbricated in cultural prejudices and dominant notions of both femininity and female sexuality. Schreiner herself alludes to this problem, when, in a letter to Karl Pearson, she states her own uneasiness with her depiction of Veronica and Mrs Drummond, but equally points to her difficulty in portraying them differently:

The parts which touch Rebekah and her friend and all the parts which interest me most I hardly need touch, but I when I wrote the book treated Drummond's wife and all the good hands-folded in the lap philistines with sarcastic bitterness. Now I feel that isn't right...I can't treat them so and it's dreary work eating one's own fire. One woman I have practically to suppress altogether, because if I don't treat her sarcastically she's no reason for being there at all. (qtd in Rive 1987 94)

In a sense, then, Schreiner's fiction deconstructs her own demand for women's access to work and education as the sole means of ending the "branding" of women as marginal to culture. While in Woman and Labour Schreiner stresses the need for economic independence to end the psychological parasitism of women, her novels do not prioritise material change. Instead, the lives of Lyndall, Rebekah and Undine all point to the absolute necessity of a change in women's consciousness if their greater material access to work or education is to have any effect. The need for such a shift in subject position, as the precondition of a change in women's social status, is emphasised by Schreiner in a letter to Mary Roberts in 1889:

Our first duty is to develop ourselves. Then you are ready for any kind of work that comes. The woman who does this is doing more to do away with prostitution and the inequalities between man and woman, and to make possible a nobler race of human beings, than by all the talking and vituperation possible. It is not against men that we have to fight but against ourselves within ourselves. (qtd in

Rive 1987 145)

Yet even when women are able to use their greater material access to culture, changes to the position of women in general do not necessarily result. Rather, as the competition between women for cultural space in Schreiner's novels indicates, access to culture for women frequently leads to their integration into culture's norms and their perpetuation of the place assigned to women within patriarchy. When Cousin Jonathan accuses Undine of reading "poetry and effete nonsense", for example, she points to her copy of John Stuart Mill and retorts, "There lies what I have been reading. Nothing very sentimental in that, I fancy" (92). Having won access to culture, Undine herself polarises "sense" and "nonsense", reinforcing precisely the binary oppositions which are used to exclude and marginalise women within culture.

The political demands of women, then, their struggles for equal pay and work, and for access to power in social institutions on an equal footing with men, and the rejection of the "feminine" in so far as it is seen as incompatible with women's insertion into culture, are all insufficient as a means to end the marginality of women within culture. Such demands, important as they are, are part of what Julia Kristeva calls in "Women's Time" a "logic of identification" which leaves intact the structures of culture oppressive to women (194). Schreiner herself recognised this, writing to Havelock Ellis in 1884 that: "The question of woman's having the vote, and independence and education, is only part of the question, there lies something deeper" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 40).

Reclaiming women's culture

Schreiner's attempt to address the "something deeper", women's low valuation of themselves and their relations with other women, is

the central motivation for her celebration of women's domestic role. In Woman and Labour, she counters the devaluing of women's domestic work by arguing that historically it constituted the origins of culture itself. While men hunted or went into battle, women hoed the earth; "we reaped the grain, we shaped the dwellings, we wove the clothing, we modelled the earthen vessels and drew the lines upon them, which were humanity's first attempts at domestic art; we studied the properties and uses of plants, and our old women were the first physicians of the race, as, often, its first priests and prophets" (34). In her discussion of ancient Greece, Schreiner's reclaiming of women's traditional domestic labour as the foundation of culture is even more apparent, as is her redefining and expanding of the "private" domestic sphere. The womanhood of ancient Greece, she argues, "underlay their society as the solid and deeply buried foundations underlay the more visible and ornate portions of a great temple, making its structure and persistence possible" (84). Rather than simply reversing the opposition of the "public" and "private", then, Schreiner displaces it, showing how, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued, "the fabric of the so-called public sector is woven of the so-called private [and] the definition of the private is marked by a public potential, since it is the weave, or texture of public activity" ("Explanation and Culture" 103).

In the alternative women's history that Rebekah recounts to her sons, a similar view of the centrality of women's work prevails. Holding up one of her sons' books, Rebekah states:

The very paper of which this book is made: - You will say, "At least that is ours made out of rags spun in English mills and beaten into paper in English factories." But, when I hold these paper leaves between my fingers, far off across the countless ages I hear the sound of women beating out the fibres of hemp and flax to shape the first garment, and, above the roar of the wheels and spinnies in the factory, I hear the whirr of the world's first spinning wheel and the voice of the woman singing to herself as she sits beside it, and know that without the labour of those first women kneeling over the fibres and beating them swiftly out, and without the hum of those

early spinning wheels, neither factory nor paper pulp would ever have come into existence. (430)

Rebekah's account thus challenges the dominant perception of women's creativity as a "blank page". Asserting instead women's ultimate creativity in both producing the page, and bearing those who will become the authors of the page, she stresses their production of the very bases of culture.

Schreiner's attempt to integrate this vision of the fundamental creativity and importance of women's domestic work into the actual narratives of her fiction is less successful, however. Of all her novels, From Man to Man is the only one located in the sphere of women's domestic labour. The novel's detailed and loving accounts of baking and jam-making, of the preparation of medicines for sick children, and of sewing and embroidery stand in marked contrast to Schreiner's other novels. Undine experiences sewing and ironing as painful and debilitating work. In African Farm Lyndall rejects the cramped and restrictive domestic world of Tant Sannie's farm as mere drudgery, just as she refuses marriage, saying to Em: "I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot; and I do not greatly admire the crying of babies" (172).

Schreiner's sense of motherhood as women's ultimate destiny is similarly questioned in her novels. Not only do Lyndall and Undine have no desire for children, but the children they do bear also die in infancy, as if the bleak set of possibilities open to women make the survival of their offspring impossible. Lyndall is an orphan; Undine's mother, a severe and punishing figure, disappears from the story when Undine is still young; Rebekah and Bertie have a mother, but one who offers no comfort or protection, and whose portrayal as "the little mother" suggests Schreiner's own condescension of her ineffectiveness. The orphaned status of Schreiner's central female characters reinforces their lack of a position within culture, as if women who aspire to independence have no place within the family.

Schreiner herself felt that she was a "motherless child".

Writing to Cronwright, for example, she states:

My mother has never been a mother to me; I have had no mother. She is a wonderful brilliant little woman, all intellect and genius. The relation between us is a very curious one; it is I who have always had to think for, guide and nurse her since I was a tiny child. (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 218)

Both Schreiner's denial of her mother as a mother, and the distance she asserts between herself and her mother speak of the difficult position of the woman writer in relation to a mother figure. As Margaret Homans argues, identification with the mother is not an option for women writers because of the negative associations of a maternal nature; in order to write they must "cast off their image of themselves as objects, as the other, in the manner of daughters refusing to be what their mothers have been" (14).

Even in From Man to Man, Schreiner's celebration of women's domestic role is highly ambivalent. Writing to Havelock Ellis about the novel, she states:

The worst of this book of mine is that it's so womanly. I think it's the most womanly book that ever was written, and God knows that I've willed it otherwise. (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 149)

Although there is a sense of pride in Schreiner's comment, it also expresses a certain anxiety or distress, perhaps because the term "womanly", although not one of abuse, has negative connotations. This ambivalence is carried over into her portrayal of the domestic world within the novel itself. Bertie and Rebekah, although both associated with the domestic sphere, differ significantly in their degree of involvement in, and in their attitudes towards their domestic work. Bertie is portrayed as exclusively concerned with domestic duties; for her Veronica represents "something new to take care of":

When all the hand-lambs and all the poultry had been fed, and there were no sick Kaffirs to attend to, and Rebekah's children needed nothing, there was always still Veronica.

(126)

While Rebekah is "happy when she kneaded her bread or mixed the salads in the pantry, and when she sat at work at the children's clothes" (240), Bertie's domestic work gives satisfaction primarily to others. The "little mother" liked to see Bertie "trip softly in and out of her room, with her gruel and soup and fresh flowers" (98), while her Aunt Mary-Anna is "filled with surprise and delight" at Bertie's refurnishing of her house (318).

The opportunities Rebekah has to escape from her domestic work, both physically in her study and on her farm, and through her intellectual work, help to account for the greater personal pleasure she derives from it in comparison with Bertie. In this sense, the depiction of Rebekah supports Schreiner's contention in Woman and Labour that motherhood, as important as it is, does not fully satisfy all women's needs for social labour and activity (65). When Rebekah returns to the farm after the birth of her children, for example, she is "like a creature returning to its old habitat and resuming its old instincts and habits", and spends all the time available reading:

Even when she was taking care of her children under the orange trees or in the orchard, she always had a book in her hand; and if one came near to interrupt her, she looked up with an eager sharp look - the look of a hungry dog eating a bone, when someone comes near him. (118)

Yet even with her greater freedom from domestic duties, Rebekah's tasks in the home appear meaningless to her at times. In her letter to Frank she tells of how her life often seems "so small when I am shut up in the house alone" (292), and when she tidies the pantry, she asks: "was it worth doing, was anything worth doing?" (457).

The implications of Bertie's restriction to the domestic sphere are far more serious, however, and represent a greater challenge to Schreiner's assertion of the creativity of women's domestic work. When Bertie makes Veronica's child a christening robe, for example,

the narrator comments:

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 the 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? (322-3)

Without a radical re-evaluation of what counts as creative work, then, any claim for the creativity of the domestic is of limited value, and may effectively serve to reinforce the perceived legitimacy of separate spheres for men and women's labour.

Rebekah's socialising of her children counters the negative image of women's restriction to the domestic realm as presented in the figure of Bertie. Once again, however, this is an ambivalent portrayal. On the one hand, Rebekah is shown to educate her sons to be neither racist nor sexist. Her adoption of Sartje, the child of Frank's relationship with the "coloured" domestic worker, is an attempt to bring her children up not to treat women, as their father has done, as sexual objects in his possession to be used solely for his pleasure. When her son refuses to be seen in public with Sartje, Rebekah emphasises the importance of respect for others, telling her sons an allegory of the way in which racism erodes any sense of worth or self-esteem in the oppressed.

It is in relation to Sartje, however, that the contradictions in the presentation of Rebekah as an "ideal mother" become most apparent. Sartje is taught to call Rebekah "mistress", and even her name, compared with those of her brothers - Frank, Hughie, Charles and Bertie - labels her as "other". Rebekah's adoption of Sartje also constitutes her denial of Sartje's mother's right to her child, and is an extension of the control she exerts over Sartje's mother

in dismissing her once she learns of her relation with Frank. Her entire letter to Frank speaks of her jealousy of his relations with women, yet it is quite explicitly his relation with Sartje's mother that motivates her demand for a radical change in their marriage. Moreover, this reaction stems from Rebekah's horror and physical revulsion of the domestic servant; a revulsion most evident in her white washing the servant's room after having dismissed her.¹¹ Rebekah's adoption of Sartje thus represents another aspect of her possessiveness towards Frank that is as exploitative and colonising as Frank's own treatment of Sartje's mother.

Rebekah's assuming the "dominant" or "masculine" role in relation to other women is also evident in her treatment of Bertie. She is frequently patronising towards her sister, particularly when she tries to protect Bertie from what she sees as the shallowness of John-Ferdinand's affection. In simply speaking to John-Ferdinand, Rebekah demonstrates a condescending attitude towards Bertie's ability to control her own life, while in her comments to John-Ferdinand she assumes an equality with him that effectively excludes Bertie. She refers to Bertie as "a child in the knowledge of men and life ... [who] does not know even the world of books", and states that Bertie lacks those qualities which John-Ferdinand would require in a wife: "more intellect and calm strength of character" (121). Such comments serve to perpetuate the view of Bertie as a child, and exclude her from culture, as does Rebekah's belief that for Bertie "only one life [is] possible, the life of personal relations" (121).

Rebekah in fact reinforces Bertie's absorption in the world of "personal relations" by failing to aid her attempts to gain access to culture. Despite Bertie's frequently expressed desire to know "the world of books", Rebekah offers her no assistance, and instead discounts Bertie's desire for knowledge. When Bertie states how she longs to be different and how she fears that no-one will love her

because she is "stupid", Rebekah "laughed softly", reassuring her that "you will be loved wherever you go; I am only afraid you will be loved too much" (119). Bertie herself seems to sense Rebekah's almost contemptuous attitude towards her, asking at one point: "Rebekah, aren't you laughing at me? You think me so foolish!" (154). Rebekah's actions are especially contradictory since in her journal she makes explicit reference to precisely those limits that are placed on Bertie's creativity, anticipating the "Shakespeare's sisters" argument of later feminists¹², when she states:

We have a Shakespeare; but what of the possible Shakespeares we might have had, who passed their life from youth upward brewing currant wine and making pastries for fat country squires to eat, with no glimpse of the freedom of life and action, necessary even to poach on deer in the green forests, stifled out without one line written, simply because, being of the weaker sex, life gave no room for action and grasp on life? (219)

As much as she seems to scorn her sister's ignorance, Rebekah venerates her affinity with nature and her domestic abilities. She watches in fascination as Bertie skims cream in the milk room, her face "almost illuminated" with the candle light (118). In this passage, Rebekah's is as much a "male gaze" upon Bertie as John-Ferdinand's is when he watches Bertie making biscuits in the pantry. Behind Rebekah's love for Bertie, then, there speaks the same assertion of difference and separation from other women - other women as sexually "Other", objects of curiosity, power and disdain - that Carol Barash identifies in Schreiner's comment on her love for her younger sister, Ellie:

I sometimes think that my great love for women and girls, not because they are myself, but because they are not myself, comes from my love for her. (qtd. in Barash 10).

Rather than asserting, as Cherry Clayton argues, the "endurance value of the love between the sisters" (Olive Schreiner 25), or, as First and Scott suggest, their "solidarity" (175), Rebekah's relation to Bertie shows once again how the common struggle of women to gain access to culture frequently erodes any potential solidarity

between them. Thus even in the one work where Schreiner attempts to present a positive view of women's traditional domestic work, and to assert the possibility of their collaboration and co-operation rather than their competition, the strength of culture's terms prevails.

Deconstructing Sexual Difference

The realisation of Rebekah's dream of meeting Frank on equal ground, as "two brother souls", still remains the primary concern within Schreiner's redefinition of culture, however. As I have argued, Schreiner both demands women's access to public work and a re-evaluating of their "private" domestic work in an attempt to end the "branding" of "woman" as marginal to culture. In the third strand of her redefinition she attempts to redefine culture by deconstructing the notion of sexual difference on which culture itself is based. Central to Schreiner's argument is her assertion that the classification of the human race according to sexual difference is the "disease from which we are suffering": "We are human beings in the first place, men and women in the second" (qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 84).

In Woman and Labour Schreiner asserts the "essential humanity" of men and women by stressing the "natural" protective instinct of the male species towards their offspring, in a way that challenges the exclusive association of women and nature. Specifically choosing examples from the "natural" world, Schreiner points to how the male mierkat exhibits "exactly those psychic qualities which are generally regarded as peculiarly feminine" (188). The status of sexual difference as a primarily social construct is equally emphasised by Schreiner's attention to its cultural representation. "In thinking of physical sex differences," she maintains, "the civilised man of modern times has always to guard himself against

being unconsciously misled by the very exaggerated external sex differences which our unnatural method of sex clothing and dressing the hair produces" (p. 161 n. 1).

Despite this awareness of the vital part of representation in the construction of sexual difference, Schreiner's argument in Woman and Labour remains bound to "common sense" notions of sexuality and sexual difference. This emerges most clearly in her claims for women's inherent pacificism by virtue of their role as mothers. "Woman", Schreiner argues, "will end war when her voice is fully, finally, and clearly heard in the governance of states":

it is because, on this one point, and on this one point almost alone, the knowledge of woman, simply as woman, is superior to that of man; she knows the history of human flesh; she knows its cost; he does not. (173)

In claiming that women are more sensitive to the costs of life "simply as women", Schreiner appeals to an essentialist notion of "woman". In doing so she obscures the extent to which, as I have argued earlier, the very term "woman" functions as ideological support for systems of cultural representation, and thus how women cannot be totally immune from the effects of this system. Moreover, history has shown that women's acquisition of political and economic power has, as Julia Kristeva demonstrates, often led to their becoming "the pillars of the existing governments, guardians of the status quo, the most zealous defenders of the established order" ("Women's Time" 201). The view of women as essentially pacifist on account of their innate nurturing qualities and their creativity has also obscured the extent to which women provide both material and ideological support for militarism, and has thus created problems within feminist strategy.¹³

Schreiner's argument in Woman and Labour also tends to support stereotypical views of differences between the sexes:

"It is a fine day, let us go out and kill something!" cries the typical male of certain races, instinctively.

"There is a living thing, it will die if it is not cared for," says the average woman, almost equally instinctively. (176)

Although Schreiner's uneasiness with the concept of instinct is evident in her qualifying phrase "almost equally", her novels echo this instinctual view of sexuality, depicting male sexuality as in fundamental accordance with men's supposedly inherent destructive disposition towards life: as an aggressive and uncontrollable instinct. Lyndall's nameless lover's relation to her, for example, is one of sadistic domination. "Your man's love is a child's love for butterflies," she tells him:

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. (223)

Although Schreiner's writing exposes the exploitation of women that results from such an attitude, those men who try to assume a different sexual identity are presented in an equally stereotypical fashion as "effeminate". In Undine, the reference to Harry Blair's reading Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's Portuguese Sonnets tends to reinforce the perception of him as weak, especially since it appears immediately after the labelling of her poetry as "effete nonsense"; "trash and sentimentality" (92). Lyndall's scathing view of Gregory Rose as "a true woman", one who would be happy "sewing frills into his little girls' frocks" (184) similarly colours the portrayal of him. The suggestion of Gregory Rose's androgyny, the ease and expertise with which he assumes the "feminine" role of Lyndall's nurse, thus tend to suggest more his weakness in being obsessed with Lyndall, than his refusal of the demands of a necessarily aggressive masculinity.

There is a move away from such stereotypical views of sexual difference at the end of From Man to Man, however, and towards a recognition of the fully political force of androgyny in creating a

radically different concept of culture. In the final chapters, Schreiner introduces the "English traveller", Mr Drummond, whom Rebekah first sees at a concert in Cape Town. Not having met Drummond yet, Rebekah is fascinated by the man's hand:

She knew it; it was strangely familiar. It called back sensations of her childhood and of her past life; she looked up curiously into his face to see who he might be. But he was a man she had never seen before ... She glanced back at the hand again, and the same strange sense of familiarity came back to her, only it seemed to have been a hand smaller and softer. Long afterwards she knew that the hand it reminded her of was her own. (446)

The suggestion of androgyny in the likeness of Rebekah and Drummond's hands is emphasised by their other similarities. Like Rebekah, Drummond is a naturalist and writer, and out of their common interests a firm friendship develops.

In one sense, the friendship between Rebekah and Drummond has the same infantile and narcissistic quality that First and Scott observe in Schreiner's relationship with Havelock Ellis (139). Schreiner has Drummond speak of his writing in exactly the same terms that she herself described her writing of the Prelude to From Man to Man, that is, that it "flashed" upon him just like "those folded-up views of seaside places and cities...[that] as you open them flash out one after the other in a second" (467). Schreiner wrote of herself and Ellis as "only children together to help each other to grow" (qtd in First and Scott 139), and her portrayal of Rebekah and Drummond's relationship has a similar child-like quality. When Drummond tells Rebekah of his writing, "he glanced up at her, almost like a little child seeking sympathy" (467), while Rebekah fantasises that when Drummond visits her:

she went up to him just as one little child goes up to another who has come to play with it. She said, "Come and I'll show you all my things!" (460)

The reason why Rebekah does not leave Frank to marry Drummond thus could stem from her sense of his likeness to herself, and her fear of his difference: the same ambivalent feelings Schreiner expressed

towards Havelock Ellis when she wrote to him that:

In that you are myself I love you and am near to you; in that you are a man I am afraid of you and shrink from you. (qtd in First and Scott 134)

While not denying that such ambivalent feelings could be an element of Rebekah's relation to Drummond, I want to suggest another reading of their relationship which counters Rebekah's (or Schreiner's) supposedly "repressed sexuality". For rather than view androgyny, as Elaine Showalter has argued, as a flight from sexual identity, I would argue, following Toril Moi's reading of Virginia Woolf's conception of androgyny, that Schreiner's conception of androgyny represents a recognition of the false nature of a fixed sexual identity, and a rejection of it as such. When Drummond visits Rebekah, she initially changes into a white embroidered gown, but then puts on the simple blue pinafore she was originally wearing: "Why should she show herself to this man looking better than she often looked?" (458). Her response is the exact opposite of Bertie's reaction to the difference between her own and John-Ferdinand's hands. When John-Ferdinand arrives at Thorn Kloof, Bertie notices "how brown, and even rough, her hands were compared to his", and shamefully covers her hand with a "little silk apron" (107). Through Rebekah's entirely different reaction, then, Schreiner points to the possibility of a concept of culture not based on a rigid, unchanging notion of sexual difference. Thus, just as Rebekah refuses her traditional "feminine" role, so Schreiner refuses to place Rebekah in any fixed position of sexual identity, and refuses to return her to such a position by having her marry Drummond. Instead, she emphasises the instability of any sexual identity, as she does earlier in the novel when Rebekah fantasises herself as a man:

She was a man, she thought, and she lived in a cottage about which there was a bush and high forest, as at the old farm ... It seemed she was lying on the earth, on mats

in the hut, and beside her lay the woman she loved, fast asleep. She felt the little head on her shoulder, the soft hair against her cheek, the little body within her arm...The little one beside her moved uneasily, and as it lay so close she felt the little body throb and knew that it was the life within it that he had awakened. (She was him, now, not herself anymore.) (226)

This account challenges the very concept of an identity, and, in pointing to the fractured and fluctuant nature of all consciously held identity, it deconstructs the notion of a binary opposition between "masculinity" and "femininity".

Drummond is equally shown as radically "other" to dominant notions of masculinity. His relation to Rebekah, instead of being marked by his dominance, is one of an intellectual "comrade and co-worker", sharing with her his knowledge and interests. His relation to Rebekah's children similarly asserts an "other" side to the "typical" masculine aggression. Rebekah discovers him lying in his garden surrounded by her children:

Little Bertie in his white embroidered dress sat at his head bending over it, dividing with his tiny fingers the short stiff curls along the top and stroking them; Hughie knelt on the left, his fingers planted on the man's chest and his eyes fixed on his face; the elder boys sat close to him on the right with their backs turned to her. He was speaking, and all were so intently listening they did not hear her steps. (454-5)

Lyndall's different relations with Waldo, Gregory Rose and the father of her child similarly illustrate the fluid nature of sexual identity. While Lyndall assumes an aggressive "masculine" position in relation to Gregory Rose's assumed or perceived "femininity", proposing to him on the condition that he serve her and expect nothing in return, she adopts a "feminine" position in relation to the father of her child, to whom she is attracted because he is "strong" and the first man she has ever feared (223). In Lyndall's relations with Waldo, the very sense of a sexual identity is entirely absent; as she comments to Waldo:

When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man; I only know that we are both beings 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. (197)

Through the relations between Lyndall and these men, then, Schreiner redefines both masculinity and femininity, showing how subjectivity and sexual identity are constructed and reconstructed ⁱⁿ a continuing process; ^{a process} whereby one is placed and places oneself in social reality, and not a fixed point of arrival from which one interacts with the world.

What is crucially important in Schreiner's depiction of the fluid nature of sexual identity is that it does not reify a purely fragmented and endlessly dispersed subjectivity: a notion which, as Jacqueline Rose argues, negates both the political and psychic necessity of the subject (Sexuality and the Field of Vision 23). Instead, Schreiner's deconstruction of the notion of a fixed sexual difference is integrally linked to her argument for a material and a subjective change in relations between men and women. For it is only in escaping from the social meaning accorded sexual difference that friendship between men and women becomes a possibility; and in turn it is this friendship that offers the "only escape from the suffering which sexual relationships now inflict" (Rive, ^{ed.} Olive Schreiner: Letters 75).

In this chapter I have argued that Schreiner's redefinition of culture comprises three distinct, and at the same time, three fundamentally inter-related arguments designed to end the "branding" of women as marginal to culture. Schreiner demands material changes in the conditions of women, insisting on their access to the public, external world as the means to end their financial dependence. At the same time, she stresses that a re-evaluation of women's private work within the family is essential, since it is their psychological dependence, women's devalued sense of themselves, which prevents them making full use of their access to structures of social and economic power. Schreiner questions both these demands, based as they are on the concept of identity, on the necessary identification

of women as women, in showing how both masculinity and femininity
* are social constructions: descriptive terms which no social subject
ever fully assumes or embodies. While I have stressed the problems
and contradictions in these various demands, my concern has been to
show the importance of contradiction within Schreiner's argument as
a whole: the way in which the inconsistencies within and between her
demands made the possibility of a future in which women would not be
"branded" as marginal to culture a persistent concern for Schreiner
and motivated her ongoing attempt to redefine culture.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Qtd. in Beeton Facets of Olive Schreiner 84. In Woman and Labour Schreiner refers to the fact that in the great majority of species on earth "the female form exceeds the male in size and strength and often in predatory instinct", going on to add that "even in their sexual relations towards offspring, those differences which we, conventionally, are apt to suppose are inherent in the paternal or the maternal sex form, are not inherent" (12, my emphasis). The important point is that Schreiner does not deny biological sexual difference, but rather questions the cultural meanings accorded this difference.
2. Lyndall expresses the same view when she argues to Waldo: "The sure sign of fitness is success. The weakest never wins but when there is handicapping ... If we are not fit, you give us to no purpose the right to labour; the work will fall out of our hands into those that are wiser" (African Farm 180).
3. For an analysis of the rationalist, scientific discourse of the Men and Women's Club and the ways in which silenced women, see Walkowitz "Science, Feminism and Romance: The Men and Women's Club 1885 - 1889".
4. Most influential in popularising this view of the prostitute was W.T Stead's exposure of child prostitution in "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", published in the Pall Mall Gazette in 1885. Schreiner saw Stead's exposé as effective in that "it may have warned a few girls, and it may have roused a few thousand women from their long selfish sleep on sexual matters" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 66). While the "Maiden Tribute" affair did politicise women and enabled them to mobilise around the issue of sexual violence, Stead's discussion not only misrepresented the nature and extent of child prostitution, but also functioned as a political displacement. As Jacqueline Rose argues, the repairing of

the moral and sexual innocence of the prostitute came to be seen as a corrective to more fundamental problems of social inequality which otherwise would not have been so amenable to such a personalised, nurturing and caring form of redress (The Case of Peter Pan 99).

5. According to the 1970 census, domestic service accounted for 38 per cent of all employed black women (Jacklyn Cock Maids and Madams, p. 322 n. 3); in the early twentieth-century, 65 per cent of all black and 85 per cent of all "coloured" women workers were employed as domestic servants (Cherryl Walker Women and Resistance in South Africa 14).

6. Undine's "madness" is evident when, after Albert Blair is disparaging about the book she has been reading, she "took the great book and quietly tore out the leaves one by one and watched them wither and shrivel in the flames": "I must be going mad," she said. "What makes me do this, and take such pleasure in doing it?" (128)

7. Writing to Edward Carpenter, Schreiner states: "I wish I was a man that I might be friends with all of you, but you know my sex must always divide", while to Karl Pearson she comments: "I am always conscious that I am a woman when I am with you; but it is to wish that I were a man that I might come near you" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 126, 108). Although she understood the reasons for women's enforced weakness, their failings outraged her; in a letter to Havelock Ellis she refers to how "awful" it is to be a woman, how the demands women make of her of are "killing", and asks that she be buried in a place "where there are no women" (qtd. in Fist and Scott 180). See Marion Friedmann (25-7) for a more detailed account of Schreiner's conflicting attitudes to women.

8. In her analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Cora Kaplan shows how Wollstonecraft's attention to the sexual as the site and source of women's educational, political and legal inequality leads her, like Schreiner, to stigmatize women's

love of pleasure as the sign of her degradation. Kaplan illustrates how Wollstonecraft argues against women's dependence and restraint by comparing their situation with slaves and lapdogs, but shows how it is "the metonymic association of 'slave', 'women', 'spaniel' that tends to linger, rather than the intended metaphoric distance, the likeness and unlikeness between them" (43). The same holds true for Schreiner's account of the female parasite; significantly, Schreiner worked for a number of years on an introduction to the Vindication, and although the introduction is unfinished, sections of it resemble the published introduction to Woman and Labour (see First and Scott 288).

9. In a letter to Karl Pearson, Schreiner refers to a prostitute and comments, "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 Olive Schreiner: Letters 65-6).

Writing to Edward Carpenter, she refers to "the unhappy women of Monte Carlo": "It's when I think of these women, Edward, that I feel I am a woman, and I'm glad I am a woman so that I may fight and there may be none of us any more at last" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 138, my emphasis), the ambiguity of the "us" further suggesting her identification with the figure of the prostitute.

10. See Rive Olive Schreiner (pp. 151-2) for a transcription of the letter in which she recalls her relationship with Gou.

11. Rebekah's class bias also becomes progressively evident in her letter to Frank: while Rebekah understands Frank's attraction to Mrs Drummond on account of "her refined face and graceful figure" (278), his affair with the "coarse and unpleasant" (274) daughter of the station master fills her with a "creepy horror" (278).

12. See Woolf, A Room of One's Own and Gilbert and Gubar, eds. Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets.

13. The role of women in Nazi Germany provides the most obvious example, but Jacklyn Cock's recent research on "Militarisation and

and the Politics of Gender" also shows how women provide support for South Africa's growing militarisation. In "Women's Time" Kristeva notes how women's identification with structures that are oppressive to them has been used by totalitarian regimes such as the German National Socialists and the Chilean Junta, and how women themselves have come to play an increasingly prominent role within terrorist groups, but she stresses a necessary caution in interpreting such actions: "The exploitation of women is still too great and the traditional prejudices against them too violent for one to be able to envision this phenomenon with sufficient distance" (203).

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

My concern in this essay has been to show how Olive Schreiner's entire "life's work" represents an attempt to displace explanations of culture constituted through a system of binary oppositions which inevitably privileges "culture" rather than "nature"; "masculinity" as against "femininity"; the "public" as opposed to the "private". Through the lives of Lyndall, Undine, Rebekah and Bertie, Schreiner illustrates the effects of women's association with nature as that which both prohibits their access to culture and renders their truly social activities marginal within culture. This "branding" of women as "other" to culture indicates the pressing need for a redefinition of culture; a redefinition that Schreiner seeks to realise through her demands for women's equal access to social, political and economic structures; for the re-evaluation of a distinct "women's culture" as the foundation of the "public"; and for the recognition of sexual difference as a category socially constructed and legitimated.

In focussing on the contradictions within and between these demands, I have pointed to the limits of Schreiner's feminism and the importance of these contradictions in motivating her on-going struggle to make possible a different position for women within culture. For Schreiner, simultaneous demands for equality, for the recognition of difference and for the displacement of difference were neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive. Rather, as she argues in Woman and Labour, the strength of the women's movement lies primarily in its diversity and heterogeneity: in its "cry for an accredited share in public and social duties"; in its "determined endeavour after self-culture"; and in its attempt to "reco-ordinate the personal relation of the sexes" (139). In conclusion, I want

to extend Schreiner's comments further, and argue for the particular importance of the co-existence of these demands for any contemporary feminist political agenda.

The development of feminist discourse is one marked by profound disagreements and division, and never more so than at present. Much of the current "crisis" of feminism reproduces a conflict endemic in the history of feminism. As a question primarily of strategy, this conflict revolves around whether feminists, recognising that women do in fact occupy "separate spheres" of social life, should demand proper compensation for their work within the family and a re-valuing of non-aggressive "feminine" principles; or whether they should reject this separation as socially constructed and thus argue for absolute equality rather than equality in difference. For the present, with the massive shift to the right in western societies and the consequent narrowing of a left political vision, there has been a move away from issues of sexual equality. Even an explicitly socialist feminism, in prioritising issues of cultural and sexual politics, sexuality and subjectivity, has been blamed within left circles not only for shifting attention away from supposedly more vital concerns of economics and class politics, and thus contributing to the present disarray of progressive politics, but also for helping institute, through its defence of homosexual rights and abortion, the waves of reaction, moralism and pro-family legislation that mark the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. Feminism has witnessed equally disturbing responses to the pro-family movement, with prominent figures of the early feminist movement such as Betty Friedan calling for women to "embrace the family in new terms of equality and diversity" (qtd in Barrett and McIntosh 17).

The rejection of equality in favour of a recognition of difference is in fact most marked within American feminism. Claims

for equality have come under "popular" attack from an emergent "postfeminism" which holds the economic agenda and anti-marriage bias of second wave feminism responsible for the present economic hardships and lack of family support facing working mothers.¹ Sylvia Hewett, for example, in a text whose very title, The Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America, epitomises the postfeminist challenge, argues that the equal rights strategy imitated a male competitive model while simultaneously denigrating the importance of motherhood in women's lives (qtd. in Rosenfelt and Stacey 84). A more "academic" American feminist discourse, under the growing influence of French theories of the feminine, has equally affirmed "la difference féminine" beyond earlier claims to equal status with men.² Both strands of "postfeminism" have been criticised for denying the necessity of feminist political practice, and for retreating from sexual politics and from an analysis of the family as a structure oppressive to women. For American "postfeminism", heterosexual marriage and motherhood are both inevitable and superior cultural forms and hence sexual subordination no longer an object of struggle. Like postfeminism, the French feminist valorising of motherhood as privileged access to an "essential femininity", a "woman's language" which escapes or defies patriarchal logic, imagines a place where sexual difference is uncontested, either secured as feminine essence or dissolved entirely.

In South Africa debates over feminist strategy are complicated by the inherent class and race bias of much western feminism. An equal rights strategy becomes indefensible, for example, when a segregated education system and the predominance of black women as domestic workers make financial autonomy a possibility for white women alone. The feminist critique of the family is also rejected for ignoring both the social and economic pressures on black women

to marry, and the real material support offered by the family in a state whose pass laws and migrant labour system actively erode its existence. In the context of increasing state repression, though, the very necessity of the "woman's struggle" is subsumed within the more pressing need for a broader non-racial struggle. Attention to specific women's issues is thus postponed; a trend in which women themselves participate by organising primarily as mothers or wives and thus defining themselves in such a way as to reinforce the very stereotypes that perpetuate their oppression.

Schreiner's strategy for a redefinition of culture suggests the terms of a resolution of the difference versus equality conflict within feminism. Central to her redefinition is the insistence on both equality and difference, not as competing claims but rather as demands that are necessarily united. Contrary to "second wave" feminists who locate women's oppression in their child bearing and rearing role, Schreiner recognises women's continuing desire for children and defends their right to have children irrespective of their marital status in a way that more accurately identifies the family as the site of their oppression. Yet in demanding that women be fully recompensed for their traditional domestic duties, she takes account of the fact that housekeeping and caring for children remain the primary responsibility of women, who, even if they are able to work outside the home, seldom earn as much as men. Although recognising that the abolition of the family is impossible given that it does answer the needs of women for both emotional and financial security, Schreiner nevertheless works to end the dominance of the family as the only institution which provides for such needs. In stressing the importance of women's financial independence within marriage, for example, she seeks to end the economic dependence of women that often renders marriage a necessity for them, while her concept of friendship between men and women

similarly attempts to develop an alternative cultural form which provides for intimacy and companionship without carrying with it the oppression inherent in heterosexual practices and enshrined within marriage.

In her concern with androgyny, however, Schreiner deconstructs both her demands for equality and for a recognition of difference. By pointing to the metaphysical nature of sexual difference itself, her redefinition avoids the tendency for both arguments to suggest an essentialist view of "woman", either by stressing the identity of all women in demands for equality, or by asserting a maternal, nurturing "essential femininity" in favour of women's difference. Schreiner's redefinition still retains demands for both equality and difference, however, for women's collective struggle for access to political, social and economic power remains as essential as their defence of women as women in order to counter the patriarchal logic which despises women precisely as women. The deconstruction of a fixed sexual-social identity in Schreiner's writing, then, works not in favour of a subversion of the symbolic against more direct political engagement, nor does it celebrate a split, fragmentary subjectivity as in itself revolutionary. Rather, in pointing to the "masculinity" of women and the "femininity" of men, Schreiner attempts to end the exclusion of women from culture by virtue of their association with nature, to displace the status of domestic work and childrearing as marginal within culture, and in so doing to eliminate both the social and psychic oppression that results from binary oppositions such as masculinity and femininity.

By emphasising the importance of Schreiner's strategy in redefining culture, I do not mean to deny the very real problems that remain within her redefinition. Drawing upon Cora Kaplan's analysis of nineteenth-century women writers, I have tried to show how Schreiner's writing elaborates a "discourse of self" whose

relation to the dominant ideologies of race, class and gender is unsettled: never wholly collusive with them, but neither totally defiant (Kaplan 11). While she breaks with the denigration of black women dominant in the colonial context, and resigned from the Cape Women's Enfranchisement League specifically over the decision to exclude black women from campaigns for the vote, Schreiner's valorising of black motherhood could be used to legitimate the double exploitation of black women, just as her defence of women's domestic role lends itself to appropriation by exponents of a "separate spheres" ideology. Virtually alone among feminists of her time in asserting women's right to sexual pleasure, Schreiner's comments on sexuality remain both elitist and racist, restricting "experiments in sexual matters" to "the most highly developed individuals" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 119), and viewing marriage as "an immorality in the highest members of the race (not in the lower)" (Rive Olive Schreiner: Letters 121), while her accounts of sex parasitism in particular carry with them traces of a reactionary view of female sexuality as a threat to social stability.

Yet too much is lost in simply discounting Schreiner's attempt to forge a new position for women within culture on the basis of these inconsistencies. The conflictual, divided self which speaks through Schreiner's redefinition of culture is precisely that which allows sexual difference, constructed as it is through hierarchies of race and class, to be kept open as a site of contestation and struggle. The coexistence of apparently conflicting demands in Schreiner's strategy for a redefinition, moreover, points to new directions for feminist political practice: directions which recognise women's common and yet history-specific cultural fate.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. My reference to the development of American "postfeminism" draws significantly on Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey's review essay, "Second Thoughts on the Second Wave", which focuses on three postfeminist texts much publicised in the American media: the Newsweek cover story of 2 June 1986, "Too Late for Prince Charming"; Sylvia Hewett's A Lesser Life; and The Good Wife, a novel by Sue Miller.
2. See Domna C. Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva".

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