

FROM (WO)MAN TO MAN: A RECONSIDERATION OF OLIVE SCHREINER'S  
QUEST FOR EQUALITY BEFORE AND DURING THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR  
1899-1902

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Before and During the South African War (1899-1902)

In this thesis, I chart the development of Schreiner's changing views on race. Focusing mainly on her political works, *The Political Situation* (1896), *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), *An English-South African's View of the Situation* (1899) and *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923), I also allude to *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), *From Man to Man* (1926) and *Undine* (1929). Looking at how and why her opinions on social Darwinism shifted from her juvenile novels of the 1870s, to her polemical texts of the 1890s, I examine the key areas of her thinking, such as miscegenation and racial and sexual exploitation, and the ways in which she applied them to her fellow white and black South Africans. Similarly exploring her childhood jingoism, her sojourn to Europe (1881-1889) and her return to South Africa, I explore her growing disillusionment with the British and growing identification with the Boers and black natives. I also consider the impact that her friendships with mathematician, Karl Pearson, and diamond magnate, Cecil Rhodes, amongst others, had on Schreiner and the way these works, her life, letters and expositions on race have been interpreted by critics and biographers up until the present day.

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I want to acknowledge that I have drawn most of the correspondence in this thesis from the Olive Schreiner Letters Project.

### Note on the Language Used in this Thesis

I want to acknowledge that in Schreiner's letters, pamphlets, articles and political texts, she employs language that is no longer considered acceptable by today's standards. In wide usage throughout the late nineteenth century, this language includes terms such as 'half-caste', 'Kaffir', 'native races' and 'nigger'. Given that she was writing at a time when these terms were not regarded as derogatory or offensive, and that the central argument of this thesis is to demonstrate Schreiner's increasing rejection of racial superiority and inferiority, I frequently refer to and replicate this language in order to disprove suggestions that she was either a racist or a social Darwinist.

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## Introduction:

### From (Wo)Man to Man: A Reconsideration of Olive Schreiner's Quest for Equality Before and During the South African War (1899-1902)

#### Thesis Overview

In 1955, on the centenary of Olive Schreiner's birth, critic Alan Gray proclaimed that apart from in the 'narrow field of the national literature of South Africa, where we are always willing to give her a place', a veil had fallen over her work and her striking originality had suffered 'eclipse'.<sup>1</sup> Whilst today's scholars are familiar with the feminism of *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *Woman and Labour* (1911), the striking originality of Schreiner's anti-imperialistic political work, which earned her the condemnation of her English-speaking peers, has undoubtedly suffered 'eclipse'. Although retaining much of the feminist thought that had made her famous- *African Farm* brought her world-wide approbation whilst *Woman and Labour* was widely regarded as the 'Bible of the Women's Movement'<sup>2</sup>- Schreiner's political writing moved away from the inequalities plaguing relations between the sexes to those blighting relations in South Africa. Written in response to the capitalist policies of English diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes and to the atrocities leading up to the South African War (1899-1902), Schreiner's political writing of the 1890s revolved around, and attempted to repair, the fractious relationship between the British and the Boers and challenged their unequal treatment of South Africa's blacks. More importantly, her factual texts demonstrated the extent to which her attitude towards all three races had altered between the 1870s and 1890s, and had moved away from the jingoism, social Darwinism and pro-British sentiments present in her early novels, such as *African Farm* and the posthumous *Undine* (1926). Averring, in *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923), that she 'had started in life with as much insular prejudice and racial pride as [...] any citizen who has never left the little Northern Island [Great Britain]', this thesis charts Schreiner's growing sympathy with her fellow South Africans (Boer and black) and will scrutinise her non-fictional work in full.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, my research focuses mainly on *The Political Situation* (1896), *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), *An English-*

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Gray, 'The Troubled Mirror: Some Notes on Olive Schreiner', *African Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 217 (October 1955), p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, ed. Mark Bostridge (London: Virago, 2004), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923) (Parklands: A. D. Donker Ltd., 1992), p. 17.

*South African's View of the Situation* (1899) and *Thoughts*. It also refers to the posthumously published *From Man to Man* (1926), which, penned throughout Schreiner's lifetime, offers a complete picture of her changing thoughts and feelings towards South Africa's diverse races.

Initially subscribing to the theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, the evolutionary language of which is clearly present in her descriptions of the Boers and blacks in her novels of the 1870s, this thesis contemplates the shift in Schreiner's opinions and allegiances following her sojourn in Europe (1881-1889). Indeed, before travelling around Europe, Schreiner was staunchly pro-British and her fiction centred upon the intellectual, political, sexual and economic inequalities existing between English men and English women. As Liz Stanley attests in 'Shadows Lying Across her Pages', 'At this time [...] [Schreiner's] major intellectual reference point was to a perceived 'home' at the heart of the metropolitan centre of England [...] [and] she saw herself as a person of European extraction, education and heritage'.<sup>4</sup> By the time she returned, however, her allegiances had shifted from the British to the Boers- and from the whites to the blacks- and she had begun to identify herself, her politics and her ethics as wholly and implicitly South African. Looking specifically at her membership of the radical Men and Women's Club (1885-1889) and at her friendships with mathematician Karl Pearson and Cecil Rhodes, I explore the reason behind this shift and assess the impact that it had upon Schreiner's later publications.

Although Schreiner's later publications had sold well in both Britain and South Africa- *An English-South African's View* sold 3,500 copies in its first five days<sup>5</sup>- her pro-Boer views had made her increasingly unpopular, and were the main factor behind the 'onset' of a 'frost' over this area of her work. Whilst this frost has begun to thaw, Schreiner's political commentary still tends to be 'overshadowed' by her neuroticism, social Darwinism and feminism. As Paula M. Krebs confirms in *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire* (1999):

While Schreiner's writings about women [have taken] their place in a feminist canon, the time has come to recognize [...] [that] her non-fiction about race,

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<sup>4</sup> Liz Stanley, 'Shadows Lying Across her Pages': Epistolary Aspects of Reading 'the eventful I' in Olive Schreiner's Letters 1899-1913, *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 32 (2002), p. 251.

<sup>5</sup> Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 113.

both in the context of the Boer War and afterwards, reveals a position that demands a more complex evaluation.<sup>6</sup>

Echoing these sentiments, I believe that the ‘time has come’ to redirect attention towards, and recognise the importance of, Schreiner’s ‘non-fiction about race’. Despite the fact that numerous scholars, critics and biographers have written extensively on Schreiner’s life and work- and have acknowledged that the ‘time has come to recognize [...] her complicated analysis of race and ethnicity’- few have analysed, in detail, her pamphlets, essays and journalistic input before, during and after the South African War.<sup>7</sup> Although Carolyn Burdett, Joyce Avrech Berkman, Stanley and Karel Schoeman have considered the reasons behind the shift in Schreiner’s bigoted beliefs to her pro-Boer stance of the 1890s, and touched upon her political works, no critic has approached it from the angle of equality, an issue that encompasses, and is omnipresent, in her fiction and non-fiction. Along with ascertaining the reasons behind this critical indifference towards, and satisfying Krebs’s demand for a more complicated analysis of, Schreiner’s non-fiction on race and ethnicity, this is something that I redress in my thesis.

Building upon the arguments of Krebs and Stanley, who has similarly remarked upon the current lack of academic interest in Schreiner’s politics and has identified the problems of limiting interpretations of her ideas on ‘race’ to either her life or work, my research takes a biographical, historical, epistemological and critical approach to her battle with equality. Thus, in my research I dwell on Schreiner’s fictional and factual writing. I also draw upon existing biographies by Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner, Ruth First and Ann Scott and Karel Schoeman, and on existing collections of her letters by Yaffa Claire Draznin and the Olive Schreiner Letters Project. In doing so, I demonstrate that, in order to understand her battle with equality fully, it is not only essential to recognise the extent to which previous biographies of Schreiner have shaped subsequent interpretations of her political writing, but also to embrace all approaches to and aspects of her life and work.

In Chapter One, I investigate previous biographical and critical approaches to Schreiner’s life, writing, character and genius. Acknowledging her disdain towards all forms of biography, I evaluate- with reference to the work of Stanley and Andrea Salter-

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<sup>6</sup> Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



the extent to which her husband, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner has ‘set the parameters of what kind of person [...] [his wife] is seen to be’ in his contentious and oft-quoted *Life and Letters of Olive Schreiner* (1924).<sup>8</sup> Providing an imprecise account of the seminal events and attitudes that shaped her childhood and adolescence, I argue that his works have reconstructed her health, writing and genius, and have wielded a considerable influence over Schreiner scholarship up until the present day. Indeed, by giving readers a distorted view of ‘what kind of person’ she was, Cronwright’s publications have not only led to an unequal emphasis on her feminine quirks and failings but have also caused her supposed egotism, hypochondria, psychosomatic illnesses and ‘hysterical’ personality to become entrenched in subsequent interpretations of Schreiner and her work. In addition, they have given weight to claims that she was a racist, social Darwinist, ineffectual political activist and had only produced one notable work, *The Story of an African Farm*. Looking at these claims in turn, and at the work of Marion V. Friedmann, First and Scott, Schoeman, Nadine Gordimer and Carol Barash, I consider to what degree his publications have skewed and undermined her political writing and achievements. I also explore the ways in which they have impacted upon the importance of and contributed to the ongoing critical disinterest in Schreiner’s views on ‘race’. More importantly, I identify the extent to which Schreiner’s quest for equality has found itself hampered by the interpretations of her contemporaries, biographers and critics.

In Chapter Two, I examine Schreiner’s views on race. I chart the development of these views from childhood to adulthood and examine Schreiner’s shift in allegiance from her self-professed countrymen, the British, to her fellow South Africans, the Boers. Up until her adolescence, Schreiner’s opinions on her fellow South Africans had found themselves heavily influenced by the imperialistic beliefs of her London-born mother, Rebecca, and by the works of Darwin and Spencer. As a result, she had become, as she admits in the preface to *Thoughts*, ‘profoundly convinced of the superiority of the English [...] over all other peoples’.<sup>9</sup> Examining the effect that this – and their purposeful segregation from South Africa’s Boers and blacks – had had on Schreiner and her siblings, I discuss her growing awareness of a ‘certain political charm

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<sup>8</sup> Liz Stanley and Andrea Salter, “‘Her letters cut are generally nothing of interest’: The Heterotopic Persona of Olive Schreiner and the Alterity-Persona of Cronwright-Schreiner”, *English in Africa*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (October 2009), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 17.

about the Boer and his life'.<sup>10</sup> Whilst Schreiner is adamant, in *Thoughts*, that this awareness had stemmed from a visit to a Boer farmhouse at the age of six, and was firmly cemented by her seven-year tenure (1874-1881) as a 'teacher on their farms', I believe that there is no hint of this gradual, almost romantic, conversion in her earlier writing. Not only do *African Farm* and *Undine* reiterate Schreiner's youthful subscription to the tenets of social Darwinism and faith in the superiority of the British, but they also present the Boers as overtly conservative, obese, lazy, dirty, backward and incapable of progress. Thus, by comparing her novels to *Thoughts*, in which she launches a blistering attack on Empire and infers that the Boers' seventeenth-century lifestyle and ideals would provide the perfect antidote to the evils of 'nineteenth-century civilisation', I look at claims that her thinking had remained unaltered until her sojourn around Europe. Debating these claims, and the factors that critics believe had led to the radical changes in Schreiner's allegiances and thinking, I use them as a means of identifying, in the words of Burdett, 'What on earth [had] happened to turn Schreiner's coruscating vision of Boer culture in *African Farm* into the encomium that *Thoughts* seems to be?''<sup>11</sup> Whilst affirming that the homesickness she had experienced during her time in Europe (Schoeman), her friendship with Pearson (Burdett) and her shock at the rapid development and exploitation of South Africa's mining industry (Stanley) had contributed to this shift, I make it clear that I believe that it was caused by a combination of these factors. Looking also at the role that her disillusioning trip to Britain and her involvement with the Men and Women's Club had played in this shift, I establish the extent to which her travels around Europe had been the catalyst for major changes in her outlook towards race, ethnicity and sexual and racial equality.

In Chapter Three, I examine what happened to Schreiner's outlook on race, ethnicity and equality on her return to South Africa. Whilst she had returned to her homeland determined to challenge both scientific and popular ideas on the Boers- ideas that she herself had perpetuated in *African Farm*- the publication of her articles on her fellow white South Africans, which later made up *Thoughts*, had found themselves disrupted by her horror over the machinations of Rhodes. Growing increasingly aware of his dominance over South Africa's mineral wealth and his manipulation of its fraught and unstable political situation- Rhodes was Prime Minister of the Cape from 1890 to

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<sup>10</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 117.

1896- Schreiner felt that she had no choice but to speak out against his retrograde attempts at ‘extending the Empire’.<sup>12</sup> Although apprehensive about his exploitation of the Afrikaner Bond (a party comprised mainly of the Dutch-speaking farming population), Schreiner was more concerned about the retrogressive results of their unity- such as the passing of legislation like The Franchise and Ballot Act (1892)- and the iniquitous effect that it would have on South Africa’s blacks.<sup>13</sup> Whilst in the previous chapter, I scrutinised the transformation in her attitude towards the Boers, in this chapter, I contemplate her changing feelings towards the ‘natives’, and her necessary shift in focus from the whites to South Africa’s blacks. Made more vital by Rhodes’ invasion of Mashonaland and Matabeleland (later Rhodesia) in order to gain control over their gold and black labour, I explore Anne McClintock’s assertion in *Imperial Leather* (1995), that ‘one of [Schreiner’s] central motivations to write: [was] the desire to rescue history, the flesh and language from oblivion’.<sup>14</sup> Looking at the ways in which Schreiner uses history, in her political texts, to try to awaken her ‘oblivious’ British audience to the dangers of capitalism, the barbaric practices of Rhodes’ British South Africa Company and their mistreatment of Mashonaland’s black ‘flesh’, I similarly discuss her endeavours to equalise conditions between the country’s racial groups. Not only do I consider her redemption of South Africa’s centuries of white masterhood and black submission, which she employs in *Thoughts* as a means of explaining the inequalities and tensions eating away at the ‘heart’ of the country, but I also inspect her fears about Rhodes effectively forcing the ‘natives’ back into a slave-like state. In addition, I look at her employment of the history of other European countries and British colonies, such as America, and her own colonial history. Rescuing the former, in *The Political Situation*, to encourage the formation of a Progressive Party in South Africa, which Schreiner hoped would stay any future retrogression, racial injustices and oppression, she similarly uses the latter to explain the ‘increase in knowledge’ that had contributed to her own increasingly liberal stance towards the country’s blacks. By highlighting this stance, I counter claims that she was

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 31 August 1895, Sheffield Libraries, Archives & Information, Olive Schreiner Letters Project Transcription’, line 12.

<sup>13</sup> The Franchise and Ballot Act (1892) raised the property qualification from £25 to £75 per annum, and, in doing so, disenfranchised a large portion of the Cape Colony’s non-white voters.

<sup>14</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 280.

a racist and that her political writing acted as an ‘apologia for the [unequal] treatment of the African peoples’.<sup>15</sup> I also demonstrate how far her thinking on equality had come.

In Chapter Four, I rescue the events that had forced Schreiner to return to, and reaffirm, her allegiance to the Boers. Looking in detail at the Jameson Raid (1895-1896) and Rhodes’ manipulation of the Afrikaner Bond, I draw attention to Britain’s past and present dealings with the Boers in order to raise awareness of the hatreds and ill-feelings that were leading the two races to war. Conscious that, during the late 1890s, relations between the two races were at their ‘most critical juncture’, Schreiner makes it apparent that her ‘two-fold positions’ as an English South African and as a ‘half-outsider’ and ‘half-lover’ had fitted her for the ‘especial function’ of making her voice heard and trying to prevent the forthcoming war. In order to do so, she not only employs *An English-South African’s View* to make clear that within South Africa itself the British and the Dutch were melding ‘essentially into one people’, but also to point up the fact that the desire for war was stemming solely from a ‘small but exceedingly wealthy and powerful section of persons’.<sup>16</sup> Proclaiming that they were bringing about this war as a means of gaining control of the Transvaal’s gold fields, I assess the effect that monopoly capitalism and imperial expansionism had on the Boers and on their land, particularly Johannesburg. Whereas Schreiner remained particularly concerned about the effect that war would have on the Boers, recent historiography has highlighted the extent to which it impacted upon South Africa’s black population. As Bill Nasson affirms in *The South African War 1899-1902* (1999), ‘the backward glance of others has gradually become infused [...] by the need to recast the war’s legacy, by reflecting long unacknowledged black sacrifice or loss’.<sup>17</sup> Not only, as writers such as John Lambert, Bernard Mbenga and Manelisi Genge have revealed, were the blacks employed on both sides as spies, messengers, guides, carriers, transport assistants and combatants- a fact that the British deliberately downplayed and concealed- but they were also as much the victims of the concentration camp system as the Dutch.<sup>18</sup> Whilst criticising Britain’s use of black guards during her time under martial law in Hanover and complaining about the difficulties that she faced in finding ‘native servants’ during this period, I use

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<sup>15</sup> Ruth First and Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> Olive Schreiner, *An English-South African’s View of the Situation: Words in Season* (1899) (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), p. 29; ‘Olive Schreiner to Sun, August 1899, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> Bill Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902* (London: Arnold, 1999), p. 274.

<sup>18</sup> See Greg Cuthbertson et al, *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race and Identity in the South African War 1899-1902* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002).

this chapter to illustrate the fact that Schreiner saw it primarily as an Anglo-Boer war. As such, I consider the military interference and action that severed her remaining ties to her motherland. I contemplate her written and vocal endeavours to cultivate friendships with and influence several major political players- such as Sir Alfred Milner and Jan Smuts. Building on this, I examine the key role that she believed women could and should play in discouraging war, and during war itself. Emphasising the part that their Boer counterparts played in aiding and guiding their men during times of conflict, Schreiner uses *Thoughts* and her allegory 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine' to stress the similarities between the two races and to encourage British women to actively 'turn down their thumbs [to war] at the right moment'.<sup>19</sup> Despite the commencement of the South African War in October 1899, it undoubtedly provided women of both races and allegiances with increased social and political opportunities, such as the chance to organise and participate in protest meetings, publish articles, campaign against the creation of concentration camps and raise money for distress funds. Whilst British newspapers were scathing of these efforts- especially those of pro-Boer women- I reflect upon the positive way in which politicians responded to Schreiner's overtures, and the effects that the war had on her battle for sexual and racial equality.

In my Conclusion, I explore what happened to Schreiner, her opinions, allegiances and battle for equality in the aftermath of the war. As Schoeman points out, 'The war had been a traumatic experience for South Africa, and for those who had been defeated it was followed by a period of adjustment which [...] [was] painful and difficult'.<sup>20</sup> Living in a village plunged into poverty and despair, and witnessing first-hand the consequences of this period of readjustment, Schreiner not only became cognisant of the narrow and intolerant Afrikaner nationalism that was taking shape but also found it necessary to "'cut herself off"' from the Afrikaner cause.<sup>21</sup> Turning her attention back to the 'natives', in 1907, she left the South African Women's Enfranchisement League due to its refusal to fight for the rights of black women. Similarly, in 1908, when Britain took steps to unify South Africa's colonies, Schreiner rushed to the defence of the blacks, averring unequivocally, in *Closer Union* (1909), that the government of this new state should make no distinction between peoples of

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<sup>19</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, December 1896, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, 'Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 44-45.

<sup>20</sup> Karel Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here: Olive Schreiner and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1992), p. 199.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Olive Schreiner to Betty Molteno (1905), quoted in Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here*, p. 207.

different races and colour. Whilst Schreiner had previously been in favour of a unified South Africa, her strong opposition to its formation by an exclusively white assembly, who made no concessions to the blacks, accentuated how far her attitudes to race and equality had come. Not only did the unification of the colonies force her to abandon her former allegiance to the Boers- and cement her disgust with and disdain for the British- but it also decimated her hopes for a progressive and racially equal South Africa.

By highlighting her involvement in these events and by stressing the continuing shift in her racial allegiances- from white to black and from Briton to South African- I have used my research to challenge contemporary and present day assumptions that her political work was steeped in racism and marred by its reliance on social Darwinism. In addition, by looking at the entire body of Schreiner's writing and by putting it in its biographical, historical and epistemological context, I redress the ongoing lack of critical emphasis on her political work and contradict Cronwright's claims that the South African War years were the least productive and significant of her life. In doing so, I prove that her anti-racist polemic is worthy of as much critical attention as her feminist novels, offers an invaluable insight into her fight for equality and warrants a place in the Schreiner canon.

## Chapter One:

### From (Wo)Man to Man: The Ongoing Reconstruction of Schreiner's Political Writing

#### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I investigate previous biographical and critical approaches to Schreiner's political writing. Notably, all of these approaches can be traced back to and are heavily influenced by both Cronwright's *Life* and *Letters of Olive Schreiner* (1924). Having been treated as infallible and indispensable resources, I look at the three major ways in which his works and editorial practices have shaped subsequent critics and biographers' interpretations of her political texts and struggles for sexual and racial equality up until the present day. Not only does he reconstruct her as a hysteric, which has led to her writing and genius being closely tied to her emotional state, but he also moulds her time in Europe (1881-1889), and especially her years in Britain, as a period of intense social isolation and intellectual failure. Concentrating on her inability to successfully pursue a career in medicine, and editing out her participation in the Men and Women's Club and her friendship with Karl Pearson, he insists that her genius had been waning steadily since the writing of *African Farm* and that the situation did not improve on her return to South Africa. Whilst the former has been redressed by numerous New Woman writers and critics, the emphasis has remained on her emotional response to the demise of her relationship with Pearson, and on her failure to produce work during the 1880s. However, as I argue in this thesis, I am convinced that Pearson, and her exposure to the evolutionary and sexual debates raging in London, had a significant impact on her views on sex and race. They also marked the beginning of her disillusionment with the British and her shift in allegiance to her fellow South Africans. In addition, I contemplate his claims that her return to South Africa- and their marriage- was overshadowed by her ongoing incapacity to write and by her decision to turn her attention to the country's corrupt political affairs and unequal racial situation. Notably, by situating Schreiner's intellect within nineteenth-century thinking on female genius, Cronwright uses her hysteria and 'unreliable' perceptions of Rhodes to insinuate that her polemical writing of the 1890s was marred by her emotions and own self-importance, would not have been published without his support and had made little impact politically.

What is particularly important about these assertions, which I challenge in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, is that they have mainly remained unchallenged by, and have become firmly entrenched in, Schreiner scholarship. As a result, critics and readers have based their own conclusions about her political writing- Nadine Gordimer and Carol Barash have labelled her a racist and a social Darwinist whilst Marion Friedmann alleges that her politics stemmed from her childhood hatred towards her mother- on highly suspect and misleading information. Scrutinising each of these constructions in turn, and situating my own arguments within these readings, I investigate the knock-on effect that biographers and critics have had on each other and how this has further contributed to the neglect of and misinterpretation of Schreiner's political texts. However, before doing so, I want to contextualise Cronwright's *Life* and *Letters* by comparing them to the hagiographical tomes of the nineteenth century and the 'new' biography of the twentieth century.

#### From 'Old' to 'New' Biography: Cronwright's *Life* and *Letters* in Context

As I argue in this section, given that both of his texts were conceived in London, were written for a predominately British audience, were co-authored with British sexologist Havelock Ellis and were published by a British publishing house (T. Fisher Unwin), I am firmly of the opinion that they should be measured against British biographical traditions. In addition, by situating them within these traditions, it is possible to trace and identify the ways in which Cronwright manipulates them in order to fit his own agenda, and exemplify Schreiner's genius and political work in a specific manner. As her niece, Lyndall ('Dot') Gregg avers in *Memories* (1955), the result is a 'strange book, which may [...] have damaged her fame'.<sup>22</sup> As I explore shortly, what is particularly strange about his 'book' is that it shuns the conventional nineteenth-century approach to genius and offers up an uncomfortable amalgamation of what Laura Marcus describes, in *Auto/biographical Discourses* (1994), as 'old' (nineteenth-century) and 'new' (twentieth-century) biography. Old, or more specifically Victorian biographies, were lengthy two-volume tomes (normally a life and letters), usually written by grieving siblings, parents, children and spouses, and were characterised by a pious and hagiographical obsession with the lives, literature and genius of 'great men'. Charting

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<sup>22</sup> Lyndall Gregg, *Memories of Olive Schreiner* (London: Chambers, 1955), p. 16.



the 'advancement' of these 'great men', and whitewashing over their flaws and failures, Victorian biographies- which were known as 'widow's' biographies- treated their subjects, in the words of Marcus, as 'secular substitutes for the saints'.<sup>23</sup> This is nowhere more apparent than in Theodore Martin's five-volume biography of Prince Albert, which had been commissioned by Queen Victoria during her forty-year mourning period. As writer and critic Lytton Strachey, whose *Eminent Victorians* (1918) modernised biography and marked the break between 'old' and 'new', remarked of Martin's work, 'To have conceived of him [Prince Albert] as anything short of perfect [...] would have been an unthinkable blasphemy: perfect he was, and perfect he must be shown to be'.<sup>24</sup> Unsurprisingly, its detractors, such as Strachey, novelist and journalist Virginia Woolf and poet and critic Edmund Gosse, baulked at its gratuitous and misapplied hero-worship, and its tendency towards evasiveness, falsity, sentimentality and hypocrisy. Regarding the biographer's tendency to 'cover up' and 'omit' as a disease that had infected biography, Woolf argued in 'The Art of Biography' (1939), that its 'grossly deformed' subjects had become 'like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey [...] effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin'.<sup>25</sup> Whilst Cronwright's *Life and Letters* focus on Schreiner's 'genius', adhere to a two-volume format, whitewash over many areas of her life and bear 'only a superficial likeness to the body in the coffin', they do not conceive her as a 'great (wo)man' nor attempt to show her as 'anything short of perfect'.

In comparison to John W. Cross's biography, *George Eliot's Life: as Related in Her Letters and Journals* (1885), which makes no mention of her scandalous affair with her long-term partner, G. H. Lewes and portrays her as a paean of respectability, Cronwright refuses to paint a similar portrait of his wife. Although there is evidence to suggest that he had suppressed inflammatory information, such as her engagement to diamond merchant Julius Gau, his evasiveness stems not from trying to protect her but from constructing a version of himself, his wife and her work that corresponded with 'his view of what posterity might be allowed to know about them'.<sup>26</sup> By emphasising her health issues, such as her asthma, and her quirks, such as her hysterical struggles to

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<sup>23</sup> Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Lytton Strachey, 'Queen Victoria', in *Five Victorians* (London: The Reprint Society, 1942), pp. 161-162.

<sup>25</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography' (1939), in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1981), p. 121.

<sup>26</sup> Olive Renier, *Before the Bonfire* (Shipstone-on-Stour, Warwickshire: Drinkwater, 1984), p. 10

write, Cronwright simultaneously shapes what he wants 'posterity' to know about her whilst seemingly kowtowing to the twentieth-century demand for a more 'honest', accurate and clinical approach towards biography and its subjects.

Seen as a knee-jerk reaction against the eulogistic approach taken in the 'Great Men' biographies, 'new' biography found itself distinguished by its attempts to utilise science to undo the hypocrisies and distortions of the previous age. Therefore, as Marcus points out, the 'metaphor' used to delineate biography shifted from the superficial likeness of Woolf's effigies to the rigorous revelations of the dissecting-table. Of this disturbing shift, the *Saturday Review* (1884) proclaimed of James Froude's biography of Thomas Carlyle, 'a minute and exhaustive anatomical demonstration has been made of every morbid structure, the scalpel of the biographer has been ruthlessly employed to lay bare and exhibit all the ravages of disease'.<sup>27</sup> Not only does Cronwright employ nineteenth-century scientific attitudes towards female genius and ailments as the scalpel by which he carries out his post-mortem of Schreiner, but also, by continually calling attention to his role as pathologist, he emphasises the prominent part he played in these proceedings. Before looking at how he employs science to anatomise his wife- and how this shaped subsequent readings of her life and work- I examine the effect that his role as pathologist had on *Life* and *Letters*.

As I illustrate shortly, one of the most notable effects of this role is his proclivity for 'laying bare' Schreiner's diary and letters in order to prove that she was prone to exaggeration, that the 'greatest facts for her were the facts of her powerful imagination' and that these 'facts' frequently supplanted the truth.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, Cronwright makes it clear, in the words of Stanley, that his wife's 'own contrary voice [was] not to be believed'.<sup>29</sup> Intimating that she was not to 'be believed' on any subject, however trivial, Cronwright insists that her lack of credibility ranged from the dates on her letters to her account of her schooling and writing. Of her schooling, which she decrees was non-existent and revolved around her religious duties, Cronwright draws attention to the fact that the thirteen-year-old Schreiner had attended classes, taught by her brother and sister, Theo and Ettie, whilst she was living with them in Cradock. He also goes to great lengths to suggest that, even if she had received the same level of education as her male siblings, who attended school and were sent to universities in Europe, it would

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<sup>27</sup> *Saturday Review*, vol. LVIII (1884), quoted in Marcus, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Life of Olive Schreiner* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), p. 271.

<sup>29</sup> Liz Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman: Olive Schreiner's Social Theory* (Durham: Sociology Press, 2002), p. 110.

have been wasted on her. As he writes in *Life*, 'I can well believe that no school would teach Olive anything, that it would be almost impossible to divert her from her own thoughts or compel her mind to do anything'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in spite of her numerous allusions to her writing and to the various manuscripts that she was working on, Cronwright alleges that, throughout their marriage and regardless of his unfailing support, Schreiner was unable to produce much of note after the publication of *African Farm*. Employing her long-awaited sex book, which she had begun in her 'early youth', as a notable example of this, Cronwright states that Schreiner often deluded herself as to the extent of her talent and as to the amount of work that she had actually produced or achieved. In spite of her claims that her 'sex-book' had been destroyed during the South African War, and despite giving a detailed synopsis of its 'scope and origins' in *Woman and Labour*, Cronwright insists that it never existed, that she would have taken such a significant manuscript with her and that it was purely a figment of her 'powerful imagination'. Maintaining 'that she may have dwelt upon [...] [it] until [...] it assumed objective form', he intimates that the 'only way she could account for its disappearance was that it was "lost" in a looting incident at their home in Johannesburg'.<sup>31</sup> Alluding to several such examples, and casting doubt on all of her assertions, Cronwright makes it apparent that his voice was the only one that mattered and the only one worth listening to.

Convinced that 'those interested in Olive Schreiner [would] desire to know something' about him, Cronwright felt 'compelled [...] to say something, however reluctantly, of [himself]'.<sup>32</sup> Taking the opportunity to list his educational and sporting credentials, his beyond average strength, his political, literary and scientific achievements and the misfortunes that had prevented him from training at the Bar in Cambridge, Cronwright places so much emphasis on himself that he becomes the subject as well as the author of his wife's biography. As one contemporary reviewer affirmed:

Having read the *Life*, we cannot remain unaware of Mr Cronwright's difficulties and sacrifices in their life together; [...] long before the end we have become oppressively well versed in them [...] Indeed, the book is really the book of Mr

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<sup>30</sup> *Life*, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> *Life*, p. 359.

<sup>32</sup> *Life*, p. 226.

Cronwright, with just so much of Olive Schreiner, her thoughts, her actions, her personality as is necessary for the high-lights and deeper shades of the portrait.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst by centring *Life* around the ‘difficulties and sacrifices’ that he had experienced during their marriage, he abides by the ‘objective’ and ‘truthful’ approach favoured by Strachey and Woolf, Cronwright is infinitely less subjective about his own gifts and virtues, and clearly regards himself as the ‘great man’ of Victorian biography. As I demonstrate later, not only does he whitewash his own flaws and failings- such as his temper, pig-headedness and questionable business dealings- but he also conceives of himself as saintly, heroic and ‘perfect’. As a result, he turns himself into one of Woolf’s effigies and ends up bearing only a ‘superficial likeness’ to the man that Schreiner had married. In addition, by making *Life* the ‘book of Mr Cronwright’, and by narrowing the gap between biography and autobiography, he seemingly adheres to the ‘new’ biographical tradition of equalising the relationship between the biographer and his subject. As Woolf observed in her essay, ‘The New Biography’, the biographer is ‘no longer the serious and sympathetic companion, toiling even slavishly in the footsteps of his hero. Whether a friend or enemy, admiring or critical, he is an equal’.<sup>34</sup> However, what is interesting about Cronwright’s *Life* and *Letters* is that they take Woolf’s claim one-step further and only include enough of Schreiner (the subject) as is necessary for the ‘high-lights and deeper shades of her portrait’. Thus, not only does he treat Schreiner as the unequal subject of her own biography and as unequal to Cronwright himself but he also makes his readers aware that she was unequal to her literary talents. As I identify, he does so by using nineteenth-century scientific thinking to feminise his wife’s health, work and genius. Scrutinising each element of her feminisation in turn, I inspect the ways in which Cronwright- and Ellis, who supported both publications and provided much of their source material- employ and exploit nineteenth-century ideas on asthma and genius. I also look at the extent to which they have influenced subsequent constructions of Schreiner and have led to her being labelled as a hysteric, racist and social Darwinist.

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Karel Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here: Olive Schreiner and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1992), p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘The New Biography’, in *Collected Essays*, 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-1967), p. 231.

## From Asthmatic to Hysterical: Cronwright's (Re)construction of Schreiner's Struggle to Breathe

As I illustrate, Cronwright's depiction of his wife's lifelong battle with 'paroxysmal asthma' and her other ongoing health problems has had a significant impact on Schreiner scholarship. Whilst acknowledging that, 'from the age of about sixteen', this 'fell disease [...] wore [her] down [...] with its almost incessant infliction of dreadful suffering', Cronwright is quick to connect it to and situate it within nineteenth-century medical, scientific and social Darwinist debates about asthma, the nervous system and hysteria.<sup>35</sup> As he stipulates in *Life*, 'it should [...] be remembered that paroxysmal asthma is commonly regarded as a kind of neurosis, connected with a special excitability of the nervous centres'.<sup>36</sup> By drawing attention to this connection, and by situating his wife within these nineteenth-century debates, Cronwright not only gives his readers the impression that Schreiner's symptoms were psychosomatic and associated with her neuroses, but also employs them as a means of denigrating, and implying that she was unable to live up to, her 'masculine' genius. Whilst I scrutinise his depiction of her genius later in the chapter, what is notable about Cronwright's construction of her ill-health is that it is indicative of the way in which he uses his editorial practices to feminise Schreiner and shape 'what posterity was allowed to know about her'. Similarly, it highlights the neurotic traits that Cronwright believed were central to destroying her genius and had contributed to her intellectual and social isolation, her inability to settle in one place, her failure to build meaningful relationship and her struggle to write. As I establish shortly, this has led successive biographers and critics, such as Ruth First and Ann Scott and Marion Friedmann, to focus on the analogy between her asthma and personality, and conclude that the former was the result of Schreiner's inability to work, her desire for equality and her problematic relationship with her family. Therefore, in this section, I not only examine Cronwright's portrayal of her ailments but also identify the wider impact that this has had on her work, including the unequal critical focus on her asthma and novels, and the resultant disappearance of her political writing. However, before doing so, I want to put Schreiner's struggles to breathe- and Cronwright's construction of them- into context.

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<sup>35</sup> *Life*, p. 234.

<sup>36</sup> *Life*, p. 91.

During the nineteenth century, there were numerous theories surrounding the causes of and appropriate treatments of asthma. Up until 1816, asthma had become a blanket term to describe any condition that caused shortness of breath, such as heart failure, kidney failure and bronchitis. From 1816 onwards, physicians attempted to redefine asthma and the majority of sufferers found themselves falling into two categories: the bronchospasm theory and the nervous (psychosomatic) theory. Bronchospasm theory worked on the supposition that electrical and mechanical stimuli forced the lungs to contract, whereas nervous theory worked on the assumption that, because there were no lesions or scarring on the lungs of sufferers after death, their symptoms must have originated from their emotions (the mind). Interestingly, these theories often intertwined, and many specialists believed that asthma was both spasmodic and nerve-related, and that one was synonymous with the other. Of this synonymy, Dr Henry Hyde Salter, whose *Asthma: its Pathology and Treatment* (1864) remained influential until the 1950s, deduced that asthma was ‘essentially, and, perhaps with the exception of a single class of cases, exclusively, a nervous disease’ and that bronchospasm was a contributory factor and not a cause.<sup>37</sup> In order to prove the former, Salter points up its periodic nature (the sufferer enjoyed intervals of health and healthy respiration), its positive response to remedies that relaxed the nervous system (alcohol, antispasmodics and sedatives) and its actuation by fatigue, physical exhaustion and violent emotion. Of the latter, he professes that the ‘associated and precursory symptoms of an asthmatic attack’- headache, drowsiness and languor, ‘peculiar and unwonted hilarity’ and sense of health- are the ‘symptoms we meet in various diseases of the nervous system, such as hysteria and epilepsy’.<sup>38</sup> By stressing the periodicity of her respiratory issues and intervals of robust health, and by alluding to the reports of her physicians- who insisted that her suffering was due to the ‘excitability’ of her nerves- Cronwright not only frames Schreiner within the nervous theory of asthma, but also links her to the ‘hysterical personality’ of the 1880s.

During the 1880s, hysteria became associated with feminism and the ‘New Woman’, and was seen as symptomatic of their demands for higher education, equal work opportunities and the vote. By demanding these rights, they not only threatened to subvert the feminine ideal but also to upend the existing social order. According to

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Hyde Salter, *On Asthma: its Pathology and Treatment* (Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1864), p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Salter, p. 35.

John Ruskin's seminal lectures, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), the existing social order was reliant upon the fact that two sexes had 'separate characters'- his 'power' was active, speculative, progressive and defensive whereas her 'power' was not for 'invention or creation' but for 'sweet ordering, arrangement and decision'- and that the home was the woman's 'true place'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, any woman thought to be abandoning her 'true place' or exhibiting signs of rebelliousness, decisiveness, independence and sexual freedom could be regarded as perverted and degenerate. Not only did such women attract public scrutiny and were warned of the physical dangers of competing with men on equal terms- such as atrophy of the breasts, sterility and mental breakdown- but they were also condemned for potentially putting the entire race at risk. Indeed, in his *Clinical Lectures on Mental Diseases* (1898), Scottish psychiatrist T. S. Clouston foresaw a future where 'all the [female] brain energy would be used up in cramming a knowledge of the sciences, and [that] there would be none left [...] for [...] reproductive purposes'.<sup>40</sup> By using their brain energy in 'cramming a knowledge of the sciences' and effectively committing race suicide, Clouston makes it clear that women writers were opening themselves up to the 'extremes of emotionality' and to debilitating 'hysterical attacks'.<sup>41</sup> These attacks, which left the sufferer exhausted but capable of making a swift recovery, were characterised by a wide range of 'feminine' symptoms, such as sobbing and laughing, convulsive movements of the body, heart palpitations and *globus hystericus*: the sensation of a ball rising in the throat and causing a feeling of choking and suffocation.

Whilst specialists had made the connection between Schreiner's asthma and her emotions, neurologist Dr Horatio Bryan Donkin, her physician and one-time suitor, had taken it one-step further and drawn attention to the correlation between hysteria and her inability to breathe in his essay on the disorder for the *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* (1892). Although sympathetic to the stresses experienced by ambitious women- he was aware that 'Thou shalt not' met girls at 'every turn'- Donkin blames Schreiner's asthma and 'nerve storms' on her repressed sexual and maternal desires rather than on the burden of her roles as a writer and feminist.<sup>42</sup> Similarly ignoring this

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<sup>39</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) (Hendon: Hendon Publishing Co., 2000), p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> T. S. Clouston, *Clinical Lectures on Mental Diseases*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1898), p. 582.

<sup>41</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Horatio Bryan Donkin, 'Hysteria', in D. H. Tuke, *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* (1892), pp. 619-620.

burden, Dr Coghill- who had treated Schreiner at Ventnor- again makes the link between asthma and hysteria, and advised that marriage and motherhood would alleviate her symptoms. As Schreiner indignantly professed in an 1884 letter to Ellis, Coghill had ‘sent his wife to talk to me. She told me her own case which was exactly like mine [...] & she said that from the day she married she never knew she had a chest again’.<sup>43</sup> By attributing these symptoms to unsatisfied feminine and maternal urges, it had evidently become ‘much simpler’, as Elaine Showalter acknowledges in *The Female Malady* (1985), to ‘see hysterical women as lovelorn Ophelias, than to investigate women’s intellectual frustration, lack of mobility, or needs for autonomy and control’.<sup>44</sup> Whereas Cronwright does not refer to her as a lovelorn Ophelia or attribute her symptoms to the repression of her maternal urges, he, like Donkin and Coghill, does ignore the strain that she was under to reconcile her public and private duties, and intimates that her asthma was evidence of her hysterical mental state.

However, rather than blaming this on her desire for economic independence and sexual freedom, he underlines the fact that she was unequal to the challenge of living up to her ‘masculine’ genius. Indeed, whereas Schreiner’s contemporaries had condemned her masculine pretensions- and had regarded her as sexually deviant and racially disruptive- it is important to note that Cronwright criticises his wife for not being masculine enough. Thus, as he makes apparent in *Life and Letters*, her hysterical ‘attacks’ stemmed not from her repression of her femininity but from her ‘helpless’ femininity overriding her masculine power and potential. Before examining the ways in which he uses this to shape what posterity was allowed to know about her genius, I want to inspect his portrayal of her asthma and hysteria in more detail, and look at how it has affected constructions of Schreiner’s health and writing. Of the former, despite approaching her femininity and hysteria from a different angle to the majority of nineteenth-century physicians and scientists, Cronwright not only goes to great lengths to prove that her asthma was ‘essentially a nervous disease’, but also to mould her symptoms and behaviour to fit those of the ‘hysterical personality’. As I demonstrate, he does this in two distinct ways.

Firstly, in keeping with the theories of Clouston et al, Cronwright directs his readers’ attention to Schreiner’s extreme emotionality- he writes that she had ‘states’ of

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 17 July 1884, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project Transcription, lines 25-29. Her punctuation.

<sup>44</sup> Showalter, p. 132.



‘exalted happiness [...] [and] bottomless despair’- and ‘explosive nerve storms’.<sup>45</sup> As he identifies, these ‘storms’ were characterised by mood swings, involuntary arm waving, pacing up and down and banging her head against hard objects. Similarly, by pointing up the periodic nature of her asthma and its actuation by strong emotions- he argues that ‘her nervous organisation was so powerful that it could react upon her body most astonishingly’- Cronwright makes it apparent that it was clearly the product of her hysterical personality.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, despite acknowledging that these attacks could be assuaged by the ‘locality’ of a particular place, town or hotel, and by changes in the weather, Cronwright infers through *Life* and his editorial techniques in *Letters*, that this relief was often short-lived, and could easily be undone by other factors. Ironically, these factors included Schreiner’s sudden, and illogical dislike for the hotel, town or rooms that had previously alleviated her symptoms. Thus, by highlighting these factors, her resultant contrary behaviour and irrational need to move from place to place, Cronwright makes it clear that Schreiner was often unreasonable rather than ill. This is particularly apparent, as Stanley and Andrea Salter reveal in their article, ‘The Heterotopic Persona of Olive Schreiner’ (2009), in an extract concerning Cronwright and Schreiner’s 1907 trip to Port Elizabeth. Whereas in the original extract he admits that they had to leave their initial accommodation because it ‘did not suit Olive’s chest’, in his revised version of the extract, he omits any mention of her asthma and infers that the rooms were simply not to Schreiner’s taste.<sup>47</sup> In doing so, he uses his editorial practices to intimate that her character traits, as well as her ill-health, were indicative of hysteria. As Donkin had argued in his article on the subject, unconventional women were apt to be idle, suspicious, selfish, introspective and asocial. As the above extract clarifies, Cronwright employs his editing processes as a means of calling attention to her lack of consideration for others, especially himself, and to construct her as having other, more self-serving, grounds for moving frequently from place to place. As he affirms in *Life* and *Letters*, Schreiner was fond of solitude, could not abide ‘close and continuous contact’ with other people- whom she grew inherently suspicious of and regularly ‘misjudged, misunderstood and alienated’- and found that all places suited her at first and ‘eventually got stale to her’.<sup>48</sup> Alluding to an incident in which Schreiner

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<sup>45</sup> *Life*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>46</sup> *Life*, p. 303.

<sup>47</sup> “‘Her letters cut are generally nothing of interest’: The Heterotopic Persona of Olive Schreiner and the Alterity-Persona of Cronwright-Schreiner’, *English in Africa*, No. 2 (October 2009), p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Life*, p. 318.

developed a sudden aversion to her sister Ettie's house, Cronwright notes that, 'Even the Homestead [...] [got] stale for her; her chest began to trouble her increasingly; she thought it might be the neighbouring stables, but *these only began to affect her after more than three years*'.<sup>49</sup> Whilst acknowledging the trouble that she was having with her chest, he uses this incident to illustrate that Schreiner's problem was psychological rather than physical. Intimating that she was 'full of fancies' and got 'all kinds of wrong ideas about herself', her 'bodily state' and about the people with whom she came into contact, Cronwright contends that her feelings of bewilderment, misunderstanding and alienation worked both ways.<sup>50</sup> Pointing out that Schreiner's personality was 'incomprehensible' to 'most people', he affirms that she was frequently asked to leave establishments due to her hysterical and anti-social behaviour. According to Cronwright, she had a tendency to stamp around late at night, slam doors and hit objects with her fists. Despite defending this conduct- he professes that it was all 'innocently done'- he leaves his readers in no doubt of the suffering that she inflicted on others and on himself.<sup>51</sup>

Whilst I explore his sufferings later, it is important to note that not only does Cronwright claim that Schreiner caused him literal sleepless nights- for the reasons outlined above- but also metaphorical sleeplessness, due to his worry over her 'fancies' about her 'bodily state', particularly her heart. Indeed, although scathing of her 'fancies' about her asthma, he reserves his most patent criticisms for her 'wrong ideas' about her heart. Despite being aware that seven members of her family had died of the same heart condition, and that Schreiner's post-mortem had verified that her arteries were 'occluded' and had caused her lifelong suffering and death, Cronwright maintains that her fears were unfounded and that it was all in her head.<sup>52</sup> Constructing her heart problems in much the same manner as her asthma, and encouraging his readers to regard it as another symptom of her hysterical personality, he uses the reports of numerous male physicians to prove that her heart was not 'seriously affected' and that there was 'no man on earth capable of convincing her that [it] was not really in a dangerous state'.<sup>53</sup> As I determine, by constructing both her health and character in hysterical terms, Cronwright not only ensured that subsequent Schreiner scholars would

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<sup>49</sup> *Life*, p. 302. My italics. Schreiner and Cronwright had bought the Homestead from Ettie in 1894, and had lived there for four years.

<sup>50</sup> *Life*, pp. 330-331.

<sup>51</sup> *Life*, p. 352.

<sup>52</sup> *Life*, p. 390.

<sup>53</sup> *Life*, p. 364.

treat her ailments as psychosomatic- and as evidence of her difficult and demanding personality- but also that they would see them as the expressions of her failures and struggles to write.

#### From Hysteric to Failure: Interpretations of Cronwright's Reconstruction of her Asthma

In this section, I show, through the work of Woolf, Friedmann and First and Scott, the extent to which Cronwright's works have shaped subsequent critics and biographers' interpretations of- and have forced them to come to certain erroneous conclusions about- Schreiner's health and writing. Treating Cronwright's *Life* and *Letters* as primary resources, and regarding her hysteria, loneliness and hypochondria as indisputable 'facts', each of these critics has, in turn, perpetuated misleading information about Schreiner, and has concentrated on and reconstructed their own versions of her personal and literary failings. Consequently, this information has become firmly entrenched in later scholarship and has permitted certain interpretations of Schreiner to replace the 'real' Schreiner. It also suggests that Cronwright's *Life* and *Letters* have remained influential up until the present day. Indeed, not only have critics remained convinced that Schreiner's ill-health had dominated her life, but also that her life, in the words of Stanley, had swung between 'frenetic but often unproductive activity, and periodic neurotic retreats into asthma'.<sup>54</sup> By focusing on these latter retreats, and by interpreting her illnesses and hysteria as the central themes of her life, each of the above writers treats them as key to understanding both Schreiner and her work. By viewing her ailments as representative of the problems that Schreiner had faced as a woman, feminist and writer, not only do Friedmann and First and Scott focus their attention on uncovering the psychological origins of her asthma, but also treat her writing and quest for equality as the by-product of her relationship with her mother. Thus, as I ascertain, by accepting the psychosomatic nature of, and taking a psychoanalytical approach to, her asthma, critics and biographers have placed an unequal emphasis on her health, and have associated her work with conflict and failure. In doing so, they propagate unfair assumptions about her writing- especially her polemical texts of the 1890s- and contribute to the ongoing critical disappearance of her later writing.

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<sup>54</sup> Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, p. 115.

Turning firstly to Woolf's 1925 review of the *Letters*, which first appeared in *The New Republic*, whilst making the point that Schreiner 'was neither a born letter-writer nor did she choose to make herself one', she clearly takes Cronwright's distorted version of his wife and her correspondence at face value.<sup>55</sup> Accepting that she was an anxiety-ridden, obsessive hypochondriac who wrote 'egotistically, of her health [...] sufferings [...] [and thwarted] beliefs and desires', Woolf not only treats her sufferings as psychosomatic but also helps perpetuate and corroborate Cronwright's 'outline snapshot' of her 'neurotic retreats' into asthma, and her self-absorbed personality. Indeed, by calling attention to her relentless 'bulletins' about her health, and unreasonable 'complaints' about her landladies, Woolf reiterates and establishes as 'fact' Schreiner's disproportionate worries about her bodily state and her suspicion of and inability to be in close and continuous contact with other people. Similarly, whilst conceding that it was Schreiner's asthma that had driven her to 'travel perpetually', Woolf implies that it was her characteristic lack of sweetness and humour, 'childish bursts of unreason' and hysterical behaviour that had resulted in her disappointing and lonely private life.<sup>56</sup> Employing a quote from *Letters*, in which Schreiner declares that she was 'only a broken and untried possibility', Woolf not only accredits this statement to her private life but also to her achievements as a writer.<sup>57</sup> Making it clear that, rather than building upon the 'possibilities' of *African Farm*, she had 'unfortunately for her fame as a writer' moved into the 'untried' arenas of debate and politics, Woolf comes to the conclusion that Schreiner was 'one half of a great writer; a diamond marred by a flaw'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, by averring that Schreiner's private life had found itself marred by her hysteria, and that her work had been weakened by her foray into politics, Woolf shows how heavily her review has relied on Cronwright's reconstruction of his wife and how readily she has accepted his claims as 'fact'. More significantly, it also demonstrates the extent to which she has helped propagate certain 'facts' about Schreiner, such as her loneliness, retreats into asthma and her neurotic personality- and has facilitated their inclusion in, and the exclusion of her politics from, later scholarship.

Including these 'facts' in her *Study in Latent Meanings* (1955), which similarly draws comprehensively on *Life* and has been referenced widely by other writers,

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<sup>55</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Olive Schreiner' (1925), in Michele Barrett, ed., *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 180.

<sup>56</sup> Woolf, p. 182.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Woolf, p. 182.

<sup>58</sup> Woolf, p. 183.

Friedmann's work builds upon Cronwright's- and Woolf's- assertions and uses them to psychoanalyse Schreiner's health, work and personality. Agreeing with Cronwright that Schreiner's asthma was influenced by her emotions- she notes that a "weight on the chest" is a frequent symbolic representation that the patient has a "load on his mind"- Friedmann similarly avers that she lived in a constant state of tension, which 'now and then' reached a 'pitch of explosion'.<sup>59</sup> However, rather than simply repeating what Cronwright has already said about Schreiner's asthma, Friedmann sets about uncovering its social and psychological origins. What is especially interesting about this is that Friedmann turns solely to Cronwright's highly contestable account of Schreiner's childhood. Despite his own admission that he had had to scour South Africa for information on Schreiner's 'early life', Friedmann does not question his belief that 'if she could be traced we should find the same person back to infancy' nor that *Life* is key to explaining the reasons behind her asthma and personality.<sup>60</sup> Looking at the 'significant' events of her infancy, such as her rejection of orthodox religion and the beatings that she had received for speaking Dutch, Friedmann infers that Schreiner's asthma had stemmed from her relationship with her mother, Rebecca. As she acknowledges in *Study*, "Psychosomatic" investigators relate asthma specifically to an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship'.<sup>61</sup> Alleging that Schreiner had spent her whole life repressing her hatred for her mother, a hatred that had supposedly become an enduring part of her personality, Friedmann avers that her guilt had compelled her to punish her protagonists and had led to her writing being 'hag-ridden by [...] the older-woman figure'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, not only do her central characters suffer unhappy childhoods, inner guilt and painful religious experiences, but also, according to Friedmann, their lives are shaped by absent or ineffectual mothers or sinister step-mothers. By highlighting the parallels between Schreiner's protagonists and her childhood, Friedmann not only supports Cronwright's supposition that the 'woman and the work were one', but also comes to the staggering conclusion that Rebecca was the driving force behind her political work.<sup>63</sup> Of the former, the connection between her life and writing has been emphasised by several Schreiner scholars, such as Schoeman and her most recent biographer, Heather Parker Lewis.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Marion V. Friedmann, *Olive Schreiner: A Study in Latent Meanings* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 1955), pp. 23-24.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Friedmann, p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> Friedmann, p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> Friedmann, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Friedmann, p. 54.

Despite acknowledging in *Other Side of the Moon* (2010) that she has avoided Cronwright's *Letters* due to their inaccuracies, and that Schreiner's politics were an important facet of her writing, Parker Lewis makes it apparent that, rather than concentrating on this hitherto neglected area of her work, her biography is a 'story about *Olive the woman*'.<sup>64</sup> As such, it 'relies, through the use of quotations from her books and letters, on Olive's own voice [...] [and] explores the hidden life and secrets [...] that Olive revealed in her writing'.<sup>65</sup> Whilst contending that her biography focuses on 'aspects' that have been minimised, missed or misinterpreted, Parker Lewis merely reiterates arguments made by Cronwright and other critics, contributes to the ongoing disregard for Schreiner's polemical writing and believes that the truth about 'Olive the woman' lies mainly in her novels. Regarding her life as inseparable from her fiction, she proclaims that '[e]very new experience and person became grist for this writer's mill'.<sup>66</sup> Tracing Schreiner's life through the experiences of her characters- she is adamant that Rebekah's unhappy marriage to the adulterous Frank is a direct reflection of Schreiner's marriage to Cronwright- Parker Lewis also agrees with Friedmann's assumption that her mother had a profound effect on her later texts. She states that Schreiner's 'desire to be of help to the less fortunate was [...] a way of asking forgiveness for not being that acceptable to [a mother] who had handed her around like a [...] piece of furniture'.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly in *Latent Meanings*, Friedmann alleges that 'the stepmother or cruel mother stalks [Schreiner's] political writing, hand upraised in aggression'.<sup>68</sup> Rather than regarding it as the result of her not being acceptable to her family, Friedmann was convinced that Schreiner's reaction to aggression and her extreme sympathy for the victims of it had been formulated by her own aggressive impulses to her mother. Arguing that *An English-South African's View*, *Closer Union*, *Thoughts* and *Trooper Peter* had all been subjected to a neurotic defence mechanism 'akin to what the Freudians call reaction-formation', Friedmann takes this one-step further by insisting that Schreiner's preoccupation with suffering not only masked her hatred towards her mother but also demonstrated her deep-seated fascination with it.<sup>69</sup> By remarking upon

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<sup>64</sup> Heather Parker Lewis, *Olive Schreiner: The Other Side of the Moon* (Cape Town: Ihilihili Press, 2010), p. 15. Her italics.

<sup>65</sup> Parker Lewis, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> Parker Lewis, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Parker Lewis, p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> Friedmann, p. 48.

<sup>69</sup> Friedmann, p. 50.

this connection between her mother and her later writing and by emphasising her almost masochistic fascination with suffering, Friedmann uses Cronwright's works as the platform from which she psychoanalyses, constructs her own version of and establishes her own 'facts' about Schreiner's political writing and personality. As I identify through First and Scott's biography, *Olive Schreiner* (1980), Friedmann's contentions have, in turn, been recycled by other writers. Indeed, despite having access to archival resources and new information about Schreiner, they continue to be dependent on Cronwright's tomes and have contributed to the overall misinterpretation of her political writing.

Whilst challenging Cronwright's editorial practices and acknowledging that 'his presentation of her personality and behaviour [had] created the Olive Schreiner of most subsequent biographies and commentary', First and Scott still regard his works as 'indispensable biographical sources'.<sup>70</sup> Despite making use of primary resources and archival materials, and redressing many of his purposeful omissions- such as her achievements during the South African War and her friendship with Pearson- First and Scott remain resolute in their belief that Cronwright provides unparalleled access to information about her childhood and marriage. As a result, their biography is greatly dependent on his account of her youth and interpretation of her asthma, and like Friedmann, employs them as the starting point for their psychoanalysis of Schreiner's health and work. Although critical of Friedmann's 'reductionist approach', which they claim collapses Schreiner's behaviour 'solely into a defence against infantile hurts' and ignores important areas of her experience- such as the policies that had inspired her political activism- they depict her work as the most 'coherent' of all existing scholarship.<sup>71</sup> They are also firmly of the opinion that Friedmann was 'obviously right to describe Olive as neurotic'.<sup>72</sup> By accepting that Schreiner was neurotic, and by pointing up the strengths and weaknesses of psychoanalysis, First and Scott aver that, by widening Friedmann's approach, they can provide their readers' with a 'way into her illness'. As they state, Schreiner's 'symptoms are neither arbitrary nor 'external' to [her] life, but carry meaning and history. They are expressive of conflicts and failure'.<sup>73</sup> In order to prove the former, First and Scott utilise *Letters* in order to look at the

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<sup>70</sup> Ruth First and Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Friedmann claims that Schreiner resigned from the Women's Enfranchisement League because of her difficult personality and 'because she couldn't get on with her fellow committee members' (p. 25); it was actually due to the fact that the franchise qualification was altered to exclude black women.

<sup>72</sup> First and Scott, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

connection between her external symptoms and her mental state. As a result, they reinforce the fact that it was the 'emotional conflicts of her life', such as her problematic relationships with her family and lovers, rather than chronic illness that had driven her to move from place to place. Similarly, despite disagreeing with the emphasis that Friedmann places on Schreiner's 'dissatisfaction with the mothering she received', they do believe that it explains her overwhelming sense of guilt, isolation and subsequent struggles with love and attachment. Of these struggles, First and Scott come to the conclusion that her asthma unquestionably dated back to her failed engagement to Julius Gau, with whom she became embroiled in Dordrecht in 1872. Dismissing Schreiner's own, confusing reports of how her asthma had started, they contend that her fear of social condemnation and guilt over her carnal attraction to Gau forced Schreiner to seek a 'neurotic solution'. As they note, 'Her symptoms- which were frequent and acute- might then be interpreted as an unconscious [and hysterical] attempt to free herself from the sinfulness of her sexuality'.<sup>74</sup> Notably, Schreiner's sexuality is an issue that has been widely debated by biographers and critics, including Vera Buchanan-Gould, Schoeman, Parker Lewis and Helen Bradford.

According to Bradford, Schreiner's relationship with Gau was 'arguably the single most important event transforming an obscure teenager into a world-famous novelist'.<sup>75</sup> Alleging further, in her 1995 article, 'Olive Schreiner's Hidden Agony', that she fell pregnant by Gau and had an abortion, Bradford insists that Schreiner concealed, revealed and reworked this traumatic event in her novels and polemical text, *Trooper Peter*. Basing this pregnancy on Schreiner's failure to menstruate, her horror of eating in front of people during this period and on later accusations that she was a 'pickpocket', Bradford echoes the link that Friedmann and Parker Lewis have made between her life and fiction by calling attention to her protagonists' endeavours to abort their respective babies.<sup>76</sup> Whereas the eponymous Undine rids herself of her 'child' by stumbling over rocks 'under the cruel eye of a blood-red sun', *African Farm*'s Lyndall and *From Man to Man*'s Rebekah attempt to terminate their pregnancies by riding around on buggies pulled by wild horses. Still seemingly obsessed with the topic of

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<sup>74</sup> First and Scott, p. 68.

<sup>75</sup> Helen Bradford, 'Olive Schreiner's Hidden Agony: Fact, Fiction and Teenage Abortion', *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 21, No.4 (Dec. 1995), p. 623.

<sup>76</sup> According to Bradford, 'pickpocket' was Victorian slang for theft of the womb/an abortion. Interestingly, Parker Lewis proclaims that there was a high probability that Schreiner purposely aborted her pregnancies by Cronwright. Not only did she supposedly feel guilty about having another child after the death of her baby, but she also could not bear to have a child by her feckless husband.



‘teenage abortion’ in 1896, Bradford claims that Schreiner’s devastation over the loss of her child and repeated miscarriages had pushed her to return to the subject in *Trooper Peter*. As I explore in Chapter Three, during his conversation with ‘Jesus’, Peter divulges that during his time working with a prospector he had purchased and impregnated two black servants. After tricking him and making their escape, Peter remains convinced that they will have no qualms about terminating a white man’s child. However, by focusing on this passing reference to abortion, which takes up a minute paragraph in the entire text, Bradford clearly disregards the fact that these pregnancies are part of Schreiner’s wider exploration of the racial and sexual exploitation of South Africa’s blacks by the British. In doing so, Bradford helps to denigrate the true importance of Schreiner’s political work. She also reconstructs a year of Schreiner’s life based on unreliable evidence, bowdlerised letters and on what she believes Cronwright has expunged from the *Life and Letters*. By taking a sexual route into Schreiner’s writing, Bradford, like First and Scott, intimates that her ‘conflicts and failures’ were the ‘product of a specific’ history rather than the result of ‘infantile hurts’.

For First and Scott, this history revolved around both Schreiner’s childhood, and her time in Europe. Measuring Schreiner’s ‘growth’ and ‘achievements’ against her exposure to the main currents of intellectual thought during her time in Britain- such as socialism and social Darwinism- First and Scott make the point that, despite breaking out of the ‘powerlessness of the traditional female role’, it had come at a high personal cost.<sup>77</sup> On the one hand, she had escaped the staunch morality of her childhood by engaging in frank discussions about sex and attempting to forge egalitarian friendships with Pearson, Ellis and Edward Carpenter. On the other hand, she had struggled to rid herself of her guilt and overwhelming sense of her wrongs. Consequently, according to First and Scott, Schreiner found that her time in Britain was dominated by the conflicts between control and powerlessness and between her duty to others and her duty to her work. Reaffirming Cronwright’s assertion that Schreiner found it difficult to form lasting relationships, they also assert that her asthma brought her ‘moments of relief’ and gave her a legitimate reason to escape from the pressures of her role as a writer and the ‘contradictions of her situation’.<sup>78</sup> They note: ‘The literal duty of the asthmatic was

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<sup>77</sup> First and Scott, p. 333.

<sup>78</sup> First and Scott, p. 335.

to ‘lie still’.<sup>79</sup> Thus, not only do First and Scott suppose that Schreiner’s asthma was psychosomatic and linked to her neuroses, but they also presume that it acted as a ‘continual reminder of her sense of utter personal failure’.<sup>80</sup> As we have already seen, they apply this sense of failure to her sojourn in Britain and to her political writing. Whilst praising the latter for its foresight, castigation of capitalism and acknowledgement of the fact that the ‘colour question was really the labour question’, they are adamant that she made ‘facile judgements’ and overlooked Boer racism towards the blacks.<sup>81</sup> Similarly examining the ‘vapid responses’ to and conflicts surrounding *The Political Situation* and *Trooper Peter Halket*, including the breakdown of Schreiner’s relationship with both Rhodes and her family, who were ardent admirers of his, I believe that First and Scott allow her achievements to become eclipsed by her loneliness and internal conflicts. Inferring that *Trooper Peter* was a ‘dead failure’ and calling attention to Schreiner’s increasing struggles to write, First and Scott not only allege that her texts were undermined by her emotionality, but also subscribe to Cronwright’s view that her time in Britain was indicative of the ongoing demise of her genius.

#### From Man to Woman: Cronwright’s Reconstruction of Schreiner’s Dwindling Genius

As I clarify in this section, Cronwright’s reconstruction of Schreiner’s hysteria, and the above responses to it, have undoubtedly led to the critical neglect of her political writing and have overshadowed what I believe is a key watershed in her thinking on race. Arguing that this took place during her time in Britain, I look at the ways in which Cronwright disparages this period of Schreiner’s life, and ensures that it has been regarded as an intellectual and social failure. Building on and relating this to his construction of her as a hysteric, Cronwright not only manipulates nineteenth-century scientific theories concerning female genius to emphasise the limitations of Schreiner’s ‘masculine’ intellect, but also stipulates that it was irrevocably damaged by the strains she suffered in Britain and by her contact with minds superior to her own.

Of the former, in *Life*, Cronwright undeniably constructs Schreiner’s genius around the Darwinian supposition that there were distinct mental differences between

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<sup>79</sup> First and Scott, p. 335.

<sup>80</sup> First and Scott, p. 336.

<sup>81</sup> First and Scott, pp. 338-339.

the two sexes. As Darwin alleges in *Descent of Man* (1871), if two lists were made of the most eminent male and female poets, painters, historians, scientists and philosophers, they would not ‘bear comparison’ and would demonstrate that man was capable of attaining to a ‘higher eminence, in whatever [subject] he takes up’.<sup>82</sup> Further exclaiming that, whereas men were blessed with the ‘higher mental faculties’ of observation, reason and invention, women’s ‘powers’ were limited to ‘intuition, [...] rapid perception, and [...] imitation’, and best fitted them for their roles as wives and mothers.<sup>83</sup> Suggesting, therefore, that women were virtually incapable of genius, even those that proved that they were found themselves dismissed, in the words of criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, as ‘unexpected’ and ‘exceptional’.<sup>84</sup> In response to this, feminists, like Laura McLaren was determined to show that all women could be ‘exceptional’, and should be given the opportunity to disprove their intellectual inferiority. As she implores in ‘The Fallacy’ (1888), ‘Women ask but one century more’ to give their powers a ‘fair trial’.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill had insisted that women’s social and intellectual oppression was detrimental to a developing society and a relic of the past. Comparing it to slavery, and to other historical customs that had enforced the dominance of men, he claims that women’s inferiority was merely the consequence of social conditioning and of ‘barriers [being placed] in the way of their using their faculties for their own benefit and for that of others’.<sup>86</sup> Whilst Cronwright admits that Schreiner possessed faculties of a ‘high order’, he is quick to ignore the barriers that restricted its growth, like her lack of education, and to imply that her genius was impeded by her femininity and child-like nature.<sup>87</sup> Asserting that it was genius in ‘default of a better word’, and existed solely on a spiritual plane, he echoes Darwin by averring that her ‘knowledge had come through powerful imagination [...] piercing perception, [...] sudden illumination [and] innate faculty of hard, close, relentless thought’.<sup>88</sup> Whilst a ‘powerful imagination’ and ‘innate faculty of relentless thought’ were usually regarded as explicitly masculine traits, Cronwright ensures that in, Schreiner’s case, they were couched in entirely negative or overtly feminine terms. Not only does he attribute the latter to the fact that she had read

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<sup>82</sup> Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man: Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 629.

<sup>83</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 629.

<sup>84</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* (1891), quoted in Flavia Alaya, ‘Victorian Science and the Genius of Women’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 1977), p. 267.

<sup>85</sup> Laura McLaren, ‘The Fallacy of the Superiority of Man’ (1888), quoted in Alaya, p. 268.

<sup>86</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869) (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1988), p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Life*, p. 222.

<sup>88</sup> *Life*, pp. 174-175; *Life*, p. 222.

great thinkers at their best, such as Herbert Spencer and Mill, but he also associates the former with her unreasonable and hysterical behaviour.

As we have seen, Cronwright was convinced that her imagination caused her to manufacture facts, which often became more real to her than the truth. He also believed that her imagination gave rise to her perceptions and intuitions, which she set 'above knowledge acquired in the usual way'.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, as he makes clear, part of the reason that Schreiner struggled to form lasting relationships was rather than getting to know people in the 'usual way'- through 'prolonged and intimate experience'- she put her faith in her intuitions and perceptions. This led to her drawing 'painful, even ludicrous' conclusions about 'particular individuals' (with men her first impressions were 'favourable', whereas with women, they were usually hostile). Averring, therefore, that her perceptions 'were an untrustworthy guide', he notes that she was 'generally a bad judge of character', idealising 'everybody' until she found out that her initial impressions of them were wrong, much to her hurt and indignation.<sup>90</sup> Whilst employing her friendship with Rhodes as the most pertinent example of this- which I examine later- he also explores the impact that her perceptions had on her relationships in Britain. Alluding to her many changes of residence, he not only highlights her frequent misunderstandings with her landladies, which he blames solely on her disruptive and erratic behaviour, but also draws attention to the agony that other people caused her. Taking this out of context, and glossing over her active involvement with London's prostitutes and the demands that they, and her admirers, placed on her time, he instead focuses on her propensity to hide under the table to avoid unwanted visitors and to flee from friends mid-conversation. In addition, he makes it apparent that Schreiner's experiences of nursing in hospitals in Edinburgh and London, both of which lasted only a few days, were blighted by her perceptions of, and inability to work alongside, other people. Whilst acknowledging that she was suffering from incapacitating bouts of asthma and pneumonia, Cronwright ultimately blames her departure from these hospitals on her misunderstandings with and misjudgements of her colleagues rather than her ill health. As he writes in *Life*, 'Anyone who knew Olive would have been able to predict with certainty that the plan [to become nurse, be under constant supervision and live in shared lodgings] would never answer'.<sup>91</sup> Coming to similar

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<sup>89</sup> *Life*, p. 222.

<sup>90</sup> *Life*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>91</sup> *Life*, p. 149.

conclusions about her desire to become a doctor- after her stint at Edinburgh, Schreiner had resolved to study for the London University medical entrance examination- it is important to note that, rather than contemplating the difficulties that she faced as an uneducated female student, he points up her intellectual deficiencies and failings. Indeed, ignoring the practicalities of her finding somewhere to train and passing the arduous preliminary examination, which included Latin, algebra, geometry and chemistry, he instead calls attention to the impossibility of her getting to grips with male classical subjects and dealing with the ‘mechanical grind of study’. Alleging that it was patently obvious that she would never qualify as a doctor, he insists that her mind was ‘too restless, too original, too absorbed with thought’ to attempt ‘anything [so] alien to her nature’.<sup>92</sup> Declaring that, amongst her papers, he had found ‘some very elementary exercises in Latin, algebra and arithmetic’, he makes it evident that these subjects were outside the scope of her intellect and that she could not cope with nor had any chance of competing with men even on the most fundamental level. Rather than point up her lack of education and increasing struggles with her health, Cronwright intimates that Schreiner’s inability to make any headway with her training and decision to ‘abandon all systematic study’ stemmed from the limitations of her genius and her decreasing capacity for close, relentless thought.

Thus, not only does he use her attempts to practise medicine to prove that she was unable to live up to either her masculine genius or the feminine sides of her nature, but he also constructs them as a source of the emotional ‘strains’ that Schreiner had undergone during her time in Britain. As Schreiner herself stated of her time in Edinburgh, ‘My visit to the Infirmary is a short painful shadow’.<sup>93</sup> Whilst biographers, like First and Scott, have looked at this visit in more detail, and have assessed the demands placed on female nurses and students, they strengthen Cronwright’s contentions that Schreiner’s dreams of pursuing a medical career ‘would never answer’. By maintaining that nursing required characteristics such as ‘continuous efforts of self-command’, and by emphasising the emotional impact of her work amongst London’s drunk and poor, First and Scott indicate that Schreiner’s inability to stay the course in both nursing and medicine was due to her intellectual and personal failings rather than her asthma.<sup>94</sup> In addition, by referring to her impulsive and erratic reactions to new

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<sup>92</sup> *Life*, p. 150.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in *Life*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>94</sup> First and Scott, p. 113.

people and places, and her unease in the presence of others, they help to reinforce the idea that Schreiner's desire to realise a childhood 'daydream' had cast an irreversible shadow over her literary work as well as her capacity for systematic study.

Indeed, despite resolving in an 1884 letter to Ellis that 'scribbling [would] be [her] only work in life', Cronwright alerts his readers to the fact that Schreiner was soon plagued by a persistent struggle to write.<sup>95</sup> Reiterating this struggle in a passage printed in *Life*, Ellis declared that by the time he had met Schreiner in May 1884, she had already 'overpassed' the 'full perfection' of her 'unimpeded mental activity'. Proclaiming that emotional difficulties during her 'first two years in England' had permanently impaired this activity, he avers that these strains had similarly prevented her from 'completing a second imaginative work of the magnitude of *An African Farm*'.<sup>96</sup> Whilst being vague about the cause of these strains, Ellis infers that, on her arrival in Britain, Schreiner had assumed a 'look of quiet amusement [...] "as if she were conscious that she knew more than you did"'.<sup>97</sup> By contending that this attitude was the result of mixing with 'totally unintellectual people' during her youth, he intimates that Schreiner's self-assertion had begun to wane during her time in Britain, and that she grew 'nervously diffident' after coming into contact with minds superior to her own. Alluding to her membership of the Fellowship of the New Life, which aimed to reorganise individual life in order to attain to a higher level of human society and was where Schreiner encountered minds such as that of socialist Edward Carpenter, Ellis avers that this had further cemented her diminishing belief that she knew more than they did. Stressing the strain that this put on her and the intellectual debt that she owed these men, Ellis not only makes it apparent that he was the 'main factor' behind helping her recover from an unspecified emotional crisis, but also that she was dependent on his knowledge and guidance. As he clarifies in his autobiography *My Life* (1939): 'she had never possessed a friend able to combine personal devotion and helpfulness in practical matters with a wide sympathetic comprehension in deeper matters'.<sup>98</sup> Whilst discussing his 'devotion' to Schreiner in Chapter Two, he insists that, having been brought up in intellectual isolation, there were 'all sorts of things' that she had needed him to teach her. Indeed, whereas his letters were consumed with educating her about current literary interests and the big questions of the day, hers were tarnished by the 'actions

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<sup>95</sup> Quoted in *Life*, p. 151.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in *Life*, p. 160.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in *Life*, p. 161.

<sup>98</sup> Havelock Ellis, *My Life: Autobiography of Havelock Ellis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), p. 229.

and reactions of emotion in youth [...] [and] seem[ed] foolish from afar'.<sup>99</sup> Likewise inferring that her work was tarnished by these actions and reactions, Ellis insinuates that Schreiner's literary struggles had originated, in the words of Yaffa Claire Draznin, from a lack of 'any analytic understanding of the skill' and from the fact that her genius was tied to her emotions.<sup>100</sup> As she herself acknowledged, 'I feel what I must, and [...] must not do; I know perfectly when a line [...] word or [...] sentence breaks the law, and it causes me agony to let it go'.<sup>101</sup> By alluding to her determination to follow her feelings, both Ellis and Cronwright allege that this was another area in which she was failing to live up to her masculine genius and that her creativity was being overridden by her hysteria. Similarly, by referring to an 1888 letter in which Schreiner told him that he was the 'finest judge' of art and literature, and by pointing out that she frequently asked his opinion on her manuscripts, Ellis adduces that any progress that Schreiner did make was because of his intervention and advice. In addition, by accentuating the importance of Ellis's role in her life, Cronwright gives the impression that he was her main correspondent during the mid-1880s, and excises out virtually all references to the Men and Women's Club and to her correspondence with Pearson, Donkin, Eleanor Marx and Elisabeth Cobb amongst others.

Whilst these excisions have been redressed by several biographers and critics, it is important to note that they have interpreted the 1886 letters between Schreiner and Pearson as intimate and reverential, and have used them as evidence of both her feelings for him and of her psychological instability. As Ruth Brandon notes in *The New Women and the Old Men* (1990), Schreiner's unrequited passion for Pearson drove her 'out of her mind'.<sup>102</sup> Moreover by concentrating on the resultant 'storm' that had arisen between her fellow Club members- both Cobb and Donkin suggested to Pearson that Schreiner was in love with him- they allow the positive impact that he had on her thinking on race to be eclipsed by her hasty departure to Europe and by her intellectual and personal failings. As I point out in Chapter Two, despite focusing on their highly celebratory discussions on the Woman Question, writers like Carolyn Burdett have allowed the intellectual benefits of their relationship to be overridden by Schreiner's 'strenuous

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<sup>99</sup> Ellis, p. 238.

<sup>100</sup> Yaffa Claire Draznin, *My Other Self: The Letters of Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, 1884-1920* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 11 April 1885, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 17-19. This extract originally appeared in *Letters*.

<sup>102</sup> Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Flamingo, 1990), p. 63.

denials' of 'any sexual feeling for Pearson' and her indignation over the misrepresentation of their relationship.<sup>103</sup> With reference to the work of the Olive Schreiner Letters Project, this is something that I redress in this thesis. As I demonstrate later, Schreiner's letters to Pearson show the connections she was making between the Woman Question and slavery, between prostitution and the sexual exploitation of black Africans, and her resolve to study their habits and customs on her return to South Africa.

Likewise concluding that, by this time, it was plain that she was struggling to write, and that her manuscripts and allegories were as fragmentary and directionless as Schreiner herself, these writers, although rectifying Cronwright and Ellis's omissions, have continued to shape her time in Britain as a period of intellectual failure rather than a period of intellectual growth. Whilst Stanley and Draznin have shown that Schreiner's struggles to write were artefacts of Cronwright's editorial practices, there is still a wide-spread consensus that Schreiner did not achieve much on her return to South Africa, especially during the South African War, and that her political work found itself hampered by her emotionality.

### From Europe to South Africa: Cronwright's Reconstruction of Schreiner's Political Achievements

In this section, I inspect Cronwright's reconstruction of Schreiner's political achievements, and look at how this has influenced critics' and biographers' interpretations of her written and vocal attempts to remedy South Africa's unequal racial situation and to prevent the South African War. As we have already seen in First and Scott, Cronwright has couched this period of her life in entirely negative terms, and has treated it as representative of her failings. Not only does he reaffirm Ellis's claim that her 'contact with [...] advanced minds' had stopped her genius from reaching its full potential, but also that she had been unable to put Britain and its associated tensions behind her and take full advantage of the healthful and solitary conditions available to her in South Africa.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, by referring, at length, to his own political achievements, to the sacrifices that he had made in order to ensure that she could take

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<sup>103</sup> See Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 90.

<sup>104</sup> *Life*, p. 176.



advantage of these conditions and to her increasing 'neurotic retreats into asthma', Cronwright takes pains to stress her inability to cope with the demands of her role as a wife and writer. Of the latter, Cronwright intimates, in *Life and Letters*, that the limitations of her genius, her neuroses, her need to keep moving and her ill-health became particularly apparent in the years preceding and during the South African War, and prevented her from producing anything more than a few, ineffectual pamphlets and allegories. By maintaining that *An English-South African's View* would not have been published without his help- as it dealt with facts- and that her 1900 speech at the People's Congress at Graaff Reinet was illustrative of her 'awful yet restrained violence', he draws explicit parallels between her political activity and her unstable personality. In addition, he avers that, due to her hysteria and her 'wrong ideas' about other people, Schreiner exaggerated the degree of persecution that she had suffered at the hands of the pro-British and under martial law, and had spent these years in isolation and in a state of nervous exhaustion. Thus, aside from investigating the extent to which Cronwright's construction of her political endeavours has become ingrained in Schreiner scholarship, I scrutinise the ways in which critics and biographers have affected and used each other's assertions to argue that her thinking was limited by racism and social Darwinism.

Turning firstly to her struggles to write, by concentrating on her failure to complete two further novels and on her inability to benefit from his attempts to recreate the 'absolute quiet' and 'lack of activity' that she had enjoyed as a youth, Cronwright sets about denigrating her political work in several ways. Not only does he minimise what she did achieve, by making it seem relatively unimportant in comparison to her literary writing, but also employs it as evidence of her ongoing intellectual failures. Of the former, he points out that, in 1894, he had taken the grave step of giving up his farm and livelihood because Schreiner had assured him that if they moved to The Homestead, where her chest was better, she would finish her two big novels within two years and make them financially independent.<sup>105</sup> In spite of her co-authoring *The Political Situation*, writing several articles on the Boers and publishing *Trooper Peter*- as well as losing her only child and dealing with the ramifications of publicly attacking Rhodes- Cronwright asserts that by failing to keep her promise she had led them into financial ruin. Intimating that she had been very well throughout this period and was completely

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<sup>105</sup> The two novels were *From Man to Man* and 'The Buddhist Priest's Wife', which was eventually published as a short story in *Stories, Dreams and Allegories* (1923).

oblivious to the ‘approaching catastrophe’, he not only contends that Schreiner’s failure to write could not be blamed on her asthma, but also that he believed that it was due to a ‘strange trait in her character’.<sup>106</sup> Following this condemnation of her character with an account of his successes, such as his articles on the habits of ostriches, he makes it clear that, whilst they did not make much money, they had upset a ‘number of accepted scientific facts’. In stressing his proficiency with ‘facts’, and by averring that he was instrumental in rewriting *An English-South African’s View*, Cronwright deduces that she did not have the skills necessary to write the pamphlet on her own, and that her genius did not extend beyond her imaginative work. Having already accentuated the connection between her writing and emotional state, he similarly intimates that her perceptions had marred her involvement in and the effectiveness of her arguments against the South African War. An important example of this is his depiction of her relationship with Rhodes. Initially seeing him as a ‘kind of socialist philanthropist’, Cronwright suggests that she had continued to admire him until she became acquainted with his capitalist policies and began to realise ‘who he really was’. Proclaiming that the ‘process of disillusionment and enlightenment’ had set in, Cronwright alleges that her hero-worship for Rhodes was gradually replaced by ‘implacable hatred’ and ‘extraordinary vehemence’.<sup>107</sup> As she herself said of this ‘process’, ‘The *perception* of what his character really was [...] was one of the most terrible revelations of my life’.<sup>108</sup> What is especially interesting about Cronwright’s portrayal of this is that he focuses almost exclusively on Schreiner’s emotional reaction to it. Whilst alluding to her despair over his mistreatment of the black ‘natives’, Cronwright instead concentrates on their explosive rows- which he states were a ‘terrible phenomenon to witness’ and made her appear ‘violently mad’- and her endeavours to save ‘Rhodes’. Furthermore, by inferring that the final rupture came as a result of her refusal to publicly shake hands with Rhodes, due to his involvement in a ‘dishonourable’ deal over a piece of government land, Cronwright stresses her hysterical behaviour and makes her seem incapable of taking a reasoned approach to his policies. Whilst critics have acknowledged that it was his participation in the Jameson Raid which confirmed Schreiner’s fears about him, and led to her indictments of both his manipulation of the Afrikaner Bond and his role in the atrocities in Matabeleland and Mashonaland, I am of

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<sup>106</sup> *Life*, p. 287.

<sup>107</sup> *Life*, p. 210; p. 214.

<sup>108</sup> Letter from Olive Schreiner to Ettie Stakesby Lewis (25 May 1896), quoted in *Life*, p. 283. My italics.

the opinion that several misconceptions about her texts remain embedded in Schreiner scholarship.

The first of these misconceptions is that her writings on both the Boers and the blacks were illogical, unsystematic and tantamount to ‘highly emotional pleadings’. Citing a comment made by Schreiner’s grand-nephew, Will Stuart, Schoeman reaffirms his belief that “‘The dominating force in Olive’s life [...] was undoubtedly love of man, mitigated here and there by hatred of some individual she conceived to have offended’”. Adding that in order to deal with this hatred, she “‘logically [...] squared the circle’”, he not only offers a simplistic reading of her work- Schreiner was often prompted by hatred of an entire system, such as imperialism and capitalism- but also undermines the clever way in which she manipulates ideologies to fit a particular audience.<sup>109</sup> As I show in Chapters Three and Four, much of Schreiner’s emotion stems from the fact that she was trying to do the impossible- i.e. square the circle of anti-Boer and anti-black thinking in Britain- and had come to believe that the best way to effect political change was through maternity and women. In *An English-South African’s View*, for example, she asserts that war between South Africa’s two races could be prevented if British politicians took a maternal approach to and recognised their maternal obligations to the Boers. She similarly hoped that, by highlighting the probable death toll of a war between these races, Britain’s wives and mothers would rise up against it.

The second misconception is that Schreiner was very isolated during the South African War, due to her suspicions of others and imagined persecutions, and had retreated into her asthma. Whilst the difficulties that Schreiner and other pro-Boer supporters had encountered during this period have been well-documented, her extensive network of political contacts, continuous attempts to influence the views of major political players, such as Alfred Milner, Will Schreiner and Jan Smuts, and her involvement in relief funds have more recently come to light. Drawing on the work of the Olive Schreiner Letters Project, I argue, that rather than retreating into asthma and her political ‘aloneness’, as First and Scott describe it, she wrote hundreds of letters during this period and made concerted efforts to effect change and alleviate suffering. I examine this in detail in Chapter Four. In addition, whilst the writing that she did achieve during the war, such as her allegory ‘Eighteen-Ninety-Nine’, has been dismissed as ‘maudlin’, I argue that, in it, Schreiner uses two Boer women- both

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here*, p. 41.

mothers of men killed during conflict- to outline the role that all women could and should play during times of war and hardship.

The third misconception is that Schreiner's political endeavours were ineffectual and hampered by her own self-importance. Of the latter, although Schoeman admits that *Life* has been 'used too extensively and uncritically', he draws on Cronwright's account of the South African War to come to the conclusion that Schreiner's hope to alter the course of events was idealistic rather than realistic.<sup>110</sup> However, instead of attributing this to the level of anti-Dutch feeling that she was writing and campaigning against, he stresses that her hope stemmed from her characteristic self-importance and that her efforts were usually to no effect. Whilst it is difficult to assess the impact that her letters had upon her political contacts, I aver in Chapter Four that they undoubtedly respected her views, even when they disagreed with her thinking. As Stanley and Helen Dampier note in "I Just Express My Views and Leave Them to Work" (2012), 'apart from the people Schreiner was personally close to, her correspondents were people she actively disagreed with and her letters were an important means by which she sought to change their mind and political behaviours'.<sup>111</sup> Examining the impact her letters had on Will, and on South African politicians, John X. Merriman and Jan Hofmeyr, Stanley and Dampier demonstrate Schreiner's success in cajoling her brother into taking a more, liberal approach to race matters. They also illustrate Hofmeyr's deep regard for her political pamphlet, *An English-South African's View*. Indeed, both he and the Afrikaner Bond paid for large quantities of her pamphlet and were convinced that her "burning words [would] find entrance where nobody else [could]".<sup>112</sup> Building on their research in Chapter Four, I explore the ways in which Schreiner used her letters to exert her influence over correspondents, such as Sir Alfred Milner and Jan Smuts, in the lead up to and during the South African War. According to Stanley and Dampier she did this by: employing her letters to act 'as a recommendation of a particular person and/or [...] cause', by terminating her correspondence with certain individuals due to her disappointment over their politics, and by brokering political deals by 'doing political favours in both directions'.<sup>113</sup> Although the Olive Schreiner Letters Project has done much to highlight her effectiveness as a political commentator, her later writing

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<sup>110</sup> Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here*, p. 34.

<sup>111</sup> Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, "I Just Express My Views and Leave Them to Work": Olive Schreiner as a Feminist Protagonist in a Masculine Political Landscape with Figures and Letters', *Gender and History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2012), p. 681.

<sup>112</sup> Stanley and Dampier, p. 689.

<sup>113</sup> Stanley and Dampier, p. 692.

continues to be neglected due to its supposed racism and apparent adherence to social Darwinism.

Looking at the observations of Carol Barash and Nadine Gordimer, I identify the extent to which critics have impacted upon each other and have misconceived Schreiner's views on race. Indeed, in her review of First and Scott's biography, Gordimer comments on a noteworthy trend then appearing in South African criticism, that of attacking Schreiner for 'turning out to be nothing but the broken-winged albatross of white liberal thinking'.<sup>114</sup> Insisting that her feminism tied her to a European 'home' and her political thinking was weakened by her faith in British liberals, whom she saw as the saviours of South Africa, Gordimer proclaims that Schreiner's 'Victorian high-mindedness' had ensnared her in a 'prison-house of colonialism' and made her incapable of understanding the inequities faced by black Africans. Treating her quest for sexual equality as entirely separate from her views on race, Gordimer writes that Schreiner's feminism had 'no relevance to the actual problem of the country- which [was] to free the black majority from white minority rule'.<sup>115</sup> Dismissive of Schreiner's decision to resign membership of the Women's Enfranchisement League, which she claims was irrelevant to the 'South African situation', Gordimer intimates that women's rights 'withered' in comparison to the powerless state of the blacks. By putting the emancipation of women 'above' the liberation of the blacks, Schreiner had allegedly shared the 'most persistent characteristic of her fellow colonials' and had failed to utilise the 'power of her creative imagination' to raise the oppressed out of the 'colonial nightmare'.<sup>116</sup> Reiterating these hypotheses in her essay, 'Virile Womanhood' (1986), Barash reconstructs Schreiner's work as 'structurally if not ideologically racist'. Contending that her 'incantatory Darwinian rhetoric' was seen in 'everything from Rebekah's fascination with evolution in *From Man to Man* to the arguments for racial development and eugenics in [...] Schreiner's other political writings', Barash argues that Schreiner had immersed herself in these ideas so completely that she had ceased to think independently.<sup>117</sup> As I maintain in this thesis, Gordimer and Barash's readings of Schreiner's racism and social Darwinism are incorrect in a number of ways, including

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<sup>114</sup> Nadine Gordimer, "'The Prison-house of Colonialism'": Review of Ruth First and Ann Scott's *Olive Schreiner* (15 August 1980), in Cherry Clayton, ed., *Olive Schreiner* (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1983), p. 96.

<sup>115</sup> Gordimer, p. 97.

<sup>116</sup> Gordimer, p. 98.

<sup>117</sup> Carol L. Barash, 'Virile Womanhood: Olive Schreiner's Narratives of a Master Race', in Elaine Showalter, ed., *Speaking of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 270-271.

the lack of attention that they pay to her views on the Boers and British. These views are central to *An English-South African's View, Thoughts and The Political Situation*.

Addressing this neglect in her 1997 article, 'Olive Schreiner's Racialization of South Africa' and in her 1999 book, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*, Paula M. Krebs stipulates that 'Race, for Schreiner, mean[t] the differences between Briton and Boer as much as between black and white'.<sup>118</sup> Whilst this is undoubtedly true, her preoccupation with what she sees as the main aims of Schreiner's political writing- to strengthen relations between the British and the Boers, and to construct a future South African nation out of the region's disparate and hostile communities- results in Krebs downplaying the importance of her thinking on the 'natives'. Not only does she suggest that Schreiner was incapable of viewing them as an important component of the future South African nation, but she also contends that she never systematically explores their tribal customs and beliefs. Glossing over Schreiner's article, 'The Problem of Slavery', in which she scrutinises the social reasons for the fact that the 'Bushmen', 'Bantus' and 'Hottentots' would make unserviceable slaves, Krebs similarly misinterprets her thoughts on 'half-castism' and miscegenation. These are issues that I explore in Chapters Three and Four. By regarding Schreiner's assessment of the 'half-caste' as a clash between her politics and devotion to Victorian science, and by proclaiming that she calls for racial purity rather than an improvement in the status of black Africans, Krebs fails to see it as part of her ongoing rejection of social Darwinism. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, Schreiner makes it clear that evolutionary theory fails to account for the 'anti-sociality' of the 'half-caste', that his position should be blamed solely on the iniquitous conditions surrounding his birth, and that his situation would not improve until the relationship between white and black was no longer based on degradation and lust. Disregarding her assertion that love could alter the status of this relationship and that an admixture of black and white blood could create a race with greater power and vitality, Krebs does concede, however, that in Schreiner's work on miscegenation she 'develops most clearly the connections between her feminism and anti-racism'.<sup>119</sup> Whereas Gordimer treats them as two separate entities and Krebs claims that they 'come together in an uneasy alliance', I am of the opinion that Schreiner's fight for sexual and racial equality was purposely and inextricably linked-

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<sup>118</sup> Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 110.

<sup>119</sup> Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, p. 135.

particularly in relation to her writing on slavery, prostitution and sexual exploitation.<sup>120</sup> Uncovering these links during her time in Britain, I similarly suggest that Schreiner's thinking began to move away from and challenge her ties to her 'European home'. Whilst these areas of Gordimer's review have been redressed by Stanley, Burdett, Krebs and in Joyce Avrech Berkman's *The Healing Imagination* (1989), I want to examine them in more detail and identify what made Schreiner cut ties with Britain. In addition, although agreeing with Barash that social Darwinism is present in all of Schreiner's texts, I believe that her political writing on black exploitation and the South African War, and her novel *From Man to Man*, successfully undercut her earlier reliance on, and evolve into a 'incantatory rhetoric' against, these tenets. Although Burdett, in particular, has explored the ways in which she rejects these tenets in *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism*, she centres this rejection on her friendship with Pearson, which I feel is too narrow, and bases her findings around Schreiner's feminism.

Thus, in this chapter, I have scrutinised the main attitudes towards Schreiner's thinking on equality and race. Stemming from Cronwright's *Life and Letters*, I have looked at the extent to which his constructions of her hysteria, sojourn to Britain and return to South Africa have impacted on subsequent critics and their interpretations of Schreiner's polemical texts. As I have shown, whilst many of his omissions have been rectified, I argue that, even in the more sympathetic accounts of her life and later writing, some of his assertions have remained entrenched in more recent Schreiner scholarship. Additionally, I am convinced that to fully grasp Schreiner's opinions on race and equality, it is necessary to examine each of her texts up to and during the South African War in depth, and situate them within her life and letters. In the next chapter, I inspect Schreiner's changing racial allegiances, the reasons behind this shift and how her presentation of the Boers, blacks and British had altered between the publication of *African Farm* (1883) and *Thoughts* (1923).

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<sup>120</sup> Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, p. 135.

## Chapter Two:

### From Briton to Boer: Schreiner's Changing Racial Allegiances

I remember it as often a subject of thought within myself [...] why God had made us, the English, so superior to all other races, and [...] [that] it was very nice to belong to the best people on earth.<sup>121</sup>

The inhabitants of the British Isles [are] a kind of growth [...] like a colossal upas-tree [...] among whose branches, according to the old fable, it was impossible for plant to flower or beast or bird to breathe.<sup>122</sup>

In the farmhouse, on her great wooden bedstead, Tant' Sannie, the Boer-woman, rolled heavily in her sleep. She had gone to bed, as she always did, in her clothes [...] and she dreamed bad dreams. Not of the ghosts and devils that so haunted her waking thoughts [...] but only of the sheep's trotters she had eaten for supper that night. She dreamed that one stuck fast in her throat, and she rolled her huge form from side to side, and snorted horribly.<sup>123</sup>

[Addressed to a Boer woman]: You are not only the backbone of your race and of South Africa, but you and such as you are the backbone of the human race [...] I see in you a promise of a great free labouring race of men and women for South Africa. The world is not played out while you sit on your wagon box and clap your whip.<sup>124</sup>

As the above passages, taken from *African Farm* (1885) and *Thoughts* (1923), indicate, Schreiner's attitude towards the British and Boers underwent a marked and irrevocable transformation. During the twenty years that passed between the conception of *African Farm* in the 1870s and the original publication of *Thoughts* in the 1890s, Schreiner's belief in the 'greatness' of the British and the inferiority of the Dutch had metamorphosed into a blistering attack on Empire and a paeon of praise for the 'sturdy' Boer woman on her wagon chest. Not only had Schreiner dispensed with her nurturing image of Empire (the Banyan tree) and replaced it with the deadly image of the upas tree- which was 'bound to destroy [...] all [...] other [...] forms of human life'- but she had also completely revised her opinions on the Boers' seventeenth-century lifestyle and ideals.<sup>125</sup> Whereas in *African Farm*, British protagonist Lyndall finds herself

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<sup>121</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923) (Parklands: A.D. Donker, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>122</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 288.

<sup>123</sup> Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) (Canada: Broadview, 2003), pp. 47-48.

<sup>124</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 192.

<sup>125</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 288.



‘stifled’ by Tant’ Sannie’s conservative, narrow-minded behaviour, lack of racial advancement and deep-seated suspicion of progress and ‘new inventions’, in *Thoughts*, Schreiner insists that the Boer-woman’s backward traits would provide the perfect antidote to the destructive evils and excesses of ‘nineteenth-century civilisation’. She remarks, ‘if [the Boers] could but cling [...] to [their] own simple healthful forms of life [...] [they] might help us [the English] to escape [...] the diseases of modern life’.<sup>126</sup> Astonished by this radical change in Schreiner’s thinking, Burdett rightly asks, in *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism* (2001), ‘What on earth [had] happened to turn the coruscating vision of Boer culture in *African Farm* into the encomium that *Thoughts* [...] seems to be?’<sup>127</sup> In order to respond to Burdett’s question fully, I believe that it is necessary to consider what happened to turn Schreiner’s encomium of British culture into her coruscating vision of nineteenth-century civilisation and Empire. Thus, in this chapter, I answer these questions by investigating the outcome of Schreiner’s sojourn in Britain (1881-1884) and by weighing up the three major arguments, put forward by Schoeman, Stanley and Burdett, purportedly explaining the reasons behind such a monumental shift in her views and allegiances. Whereas Schoeman contends that Schreiner’s affection for the Boers was brought on by homesickness during her time in Europe and Burdett maintains that her relationship with Pearson was the catalyst for major changes in her thinking on social Darwinism, Stanley alleges that her views did not alter until her return to South Africa in 1889.

However, before examining these arguments in full, I explore the effects of Schreiner’s colonial upbringing and evaluate the influence that her mother, Rebecca, had over her outlook towards South Africa’s white and dark races. As she herself concedes, ‘My training was exclusively and strongly English [...] I have only to return to the experiences of my early infancy to know what the most fully developed Jingoism means’.<sup>128</sup> Assessing the impact that this jingoism had on *African Farm* and on her first novel, *Undine* (1926), I look at Schreiner’s attempts to delineate the British and the Dutch and identify the ways in which she characterises them as two distinct and disparate racial groups. As I determine, Schreiner’s characterisation of the Boers- as obese, dirty, illiterate, greedy peasants who clung fiercely to their Calvinist faith and distanced themselves from the intellectual life of Europe- not only adhered to Victorian

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<sup>126</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 235.

<sup>127</sup> Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 117.

<sup>128</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 17-18.

stereotypes, but was also indicative of the ‘exclusively and strongly English training’ that Schreiner had received as a child. Analysing each of the Boers’ ‘traits’ in turn, I weigh them up against the supposedly superior attributes of Lyndall and Undine. I also look at how they correspond with Schreiner’s portrayal of these same traits in *Thoughts*. In addition, having acquainted herself with the debates, movements and ideologies dominating nineteenth-century British thought- such as feminism and social Darwinism- I ascertain the extent to which the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spencer heightened Schreiner’s jingoism, shaped her fictional depiction of race and affected her ongoing quest for equality.

### From Infant to Adolescent: Schreiner’s Childhood Jingoism

In this section, I assess the effect that Schreiner’s upbringing had on her outlook on race, and scrutinise the events that she believed had contributed to her fully developed jingoism. Arguing that as a child, Rebecca had inculcated Schreiner and her siblings with her unreasoning, bigoted, imperialistic beliefs, I look at the ways in which she had ensured that their training and conduct remained exclusively British. Indeed, in keeping with her husband Gottlob’s missionary endeavours- and her own staunch, illiberal and dogmatic middle-class Methodist upbringing- Rebecca had insisted that their training should revolve around religious orthodoxy, proper feminine behaviour and British ethnic superiority. Not only did religion become a way of life for Schreiner and her siblings- who were forced into a dutiful, isolated and toilsome existence and kept in a state of perpetual accountability, self-scrutiny and self-deprivation- but also she and her sisters were ‘kept close’ and actively discouraged from forming romantic attachments of any kind. Often taking the latter to extremes, which demonstrated their commitment to keeping their daughters virtuous and pure, Rebecca and Gottlob chastised eldest daughter, Katie, for actively encouraging the attentions of future husband John Findlay. Disgusted by their sacrilegious ‘exchanging of looks’ in Church, they banned Katie and Findlay from associating with the younger Schreiner siblings, in case they ‘polluted’ them. They also made it plain that they wanted them to abandon the idea of getting married. Despite postponing the wedding for three months and doing everything in her power to prove that she was a dutiful daughter- such as tolerating her ‘intended husband [being] talked against’- both Rebecca and Gottlob refused to accept Katie’s marriage to

Findlay and eventually debarred her from receiving communion at their church.<sup>129</sup> Attempting to explain their actions, Rebecca took pains to stress the link between her daughter's 'impropriety' and her exposure to the 'primitive' and 'hedonistic' black 'natives'. She writes, "You likely do not know how difficult it is, living as we do among gross sensual heathen, to preserve that delicacy of thought and feeling so indispensable to a right development of the female character".<sup>130</sup> Whilst, as I show later, Rebecca's anxiety about her whole family being 'blackened' by their close proximity to the 'natives' was an ongoing concern amongst nineteenth-century British settlers, it also increased her determination to convince her children that they belonged to the best, and most superior, race in the world.

Putting this into context, Rebecca, like many of her fellow English immigrants, had failed to come to terms with the harsh and 'uncivilised' realities of South African life. Surrounded by war, disease and barren terrain, and often posted to mission stations hundreds of miles away from the nearest amenities, Rebecca had found herself entirely cut off from the cosmopolitan lifestyle and educated, middle-class people she had grown up amongst in London. Whilst an ardent supporter of the Wesleyan mission, which was characterised by revivalist meetings and conversions, and although passionate about bringing the gospel of salvation to the 'heathen', she struggled to stave off an increasing sense of loneliness and disillusionment. Despite insisting that she was content to 'submit patiently' to the 'will of God' and remain in South Africa, her feelings of disenchantment were exacerbated further by Gottlob's failure to liberate the hostile 'natives' from paganism and licentiousness and persuade them to substitute their deeply entrenched ancestral customs for the doctrines of Christ. As she wearily remarked of the Baramokgele Taung tribe at Basel mission station, the "'benighted heathen'" of this "'dark land'" prefer the "'long sleep of apathy and sin'".<sup>131</sup> With their missionary endeavours in tatters, she, like the 'little mother' in Schreiner's *From Man to Man* (1926), spent hours lamenting over the 'hardships of her life' in Africa and reminiscing about 'her home in England, which she had left as a girl'.<sup>132</sup> Although this home was merely a 'simple country parsonage', when 'seen through the refracting mist of [...] years of African life, it had slowly assumed [...] increasing proportions of luxury

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<sup>129</sup> Ruth First and Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 46.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in First and Scott, p. 46.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Karel Schoeman, *Olive Schreiner: A Woman in South Africa, 1855-1881* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1991), p. 35.

<sup>132</sup> Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man* (1926), ed., Paul Foot (London: Virago Press, 1982), p. 94.

and beauty'.<sup>133</sup> Viewed through this same 'refracting mist', all of Rebecca's memories of England assumed similar proportions of 'luxury and beauty'. This was by no means a unique reaction. Many British settlers found that life on the frontier exacerbated their already fierce love of their homeland and intensified their feelings of racial pride. Unable to reconcile these feelings with her new surroundings and made to feel unwelcome by both the blacks and the Boers, who were suspicious of any form of British governance, Rebecca steadfastly refused to bridge the gap between herself and other cultures. Instead, she made every effort to maintain, and put all her energy into preserving, her family's Britishness.

Desperate to preserve their 'delicacy of thought and feeling' and keep them safe from the influence of the 'swarthy demon of the house', she not only wanted her children to be schooled beyond the reach of the 'natives', but also beseeched them to treat servants "as servants" and regard them in an entirely "different light from the European".<sup>134</sup> Whilst there is no such record of her attitude towards the European Boers, it is evident that, although she saw them as a lesser threat, she wanted to shield her family from, and cultivate within them an analogous level of intolerance and feeling of superiority over, their 'coarse' white neighbours. Not only did she forbid the children from speaking one word of the Dutch 'Taal'- for simply uttering the phrase, 'Ach, how nice it is outside', Rebecca forced the young Schreiner over her knee and beat her fifty times with a bunch of quince rods- but she also instilled in them a fear of interacting socially with the Boers.

Examining the effect this had on her childhood in the preface to *Thoughts*, Schreiner recalls the revulsion that her four-year-old self had felt when a young Boer girl had clambered down from an outspanned wagon and presented her with a fistful of dark brown sugar. Although politely accepting the offering from the child's outstretched hand, Schreiner waited until she had gone and then sprinkled it on the ground. She writes, 'To have eaten sugar that had been in the hand of a Boer child would have been absolutely impossible to me'.<sup>135</sup> Around the same time as her meeting with the Boer girl, a Dutch Reformed minister, of Scottish descent, had spent the night at her up-country home. With space being extremely limited, Schreiner was compelled to give up her room and the minister had stayed in her bed. On inquiring the following

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<sup>133</sup> *From Man to Man*, p. 94.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Schoeman, *A Woman in South Africa*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>135</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 18.

night if her bed had been freshly made, she was told firmly that as the clergyman had only slept in the bed for one night she ‘might well’ use the same sheets. Horrified, at the thought of getting into an ‘unclean’ bed, she made her family patently aware that ‘Nothing [...] would ever induce [her] to sleep between the sheets a Dutchman had slept between’.<sup>136</sup> In spite of their repeated protestations that, although a Dutch minister, he was not actually a Dutchman, Schreiner remained ‘resolute and passed the night on the outside of the quilt’.<sup>137</sup> By recollecting these memories, Schreiner hoped to explain the reasons behind her earlier jingoism and to convince her readers that her feelings towards her fellow South Africans had undergone a dramatic transformation. As she observes, ‘Later on, my feeling for the Boer changed [...] this was not the result of any training, but simply of an increased knowledge’.<sup>138</sup> This was, as she avers in *Thoughts*, a gradual process. Dating it back to her visit to a Boer farmhouse at the age of six, Schreiner proclaims that her ‘day and a night there [...] made a curiously deep impression on me’ and left her aware of a ‘certain political charm about the Boer and his life’.<sup>139</sup> Whilst still mindful of her own racial superiority, additional visits to another Dutch farmhouse in order to fetch milk, and a budding fascination with Boer history, which was typified by sufferings and wrongs, had amplified their ‘charm’ and triggered her ‘sympathetic interest’ in their free and uncomplicated lives. As she records in the preface, this sympathetic interest was further compounded by her ‘five-year’ tenure (in reality, 1874-1881) as a teacher on their farms. Bringing her into the ‘closest [possible] mental contact’ with the Boers, it not only enabled her to watch them ‘in all the vicissitudes of life, from birth to marriage and death’, but also taught her to love and admire them.<sup>140</sup> However, there is no such hint of this gradual, almost romantic, conversion in her earlier writings, and novels such as *African Farm* and *Undine* appear to substantiate claims that her devotion to her homeland and its peoples did not emerge until her sojourn in Europe. Before looking in detail at Schreiner’s portrayal of the Boers and the British in her earlier writings, I first put these ideas into context and scrutinise nineteenth-century attitudes towards race and ethnicity.

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<sup>136</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 18.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 20.

## From Mammal to Man: Nineteenth-Century Attitudes towards Race and Ethnicity

During the 1870s, a spiritually bereft Schreiner had turned to science as a means of understanding the connection between man and the universe, and had familiarised herself with the prevalent theories regarding race, such as craniology, natural selection, anthropology and animal analogies. During the mid-to late-nineteenth century, these theories were being employed as a means of re-establishing the long-held political, occupational, legal and educational inequalities between European and non-European races. As was the case with sexual inequality, whilst the majority of Victorians accepted it without question, a growing number of radical middle-class and upper-class dissenters were making their displeasure known. Not only was the burgeoning feminist movement clamouring for suffrage, entry to higher education and marital reforms, but British scientists also wanted to quell any resistance to its exploitation of and dominion over other races. In order to quell this resistance and discredit the claims of women and colonised peoples to equal rights and treatment, thinkers like Darwin and Spencer turned to evolution and anthropology as a means of verifying their 'natural' and historical inferiority and reinforcing the status quo. By drawing on the above theories, and by comparing the anatomy, physiology, temperament and intellect of human beings to that of the lower and higher mammals, Darwin and Spencer threw the whole weight of science behind confirming white racial hegemony and advocating the need for the sexual and racial division of labour. Alleging that the woman's role as a wife and mother was crucial for the continuance of the race, Darwinists and anthropologists similarly argued that it was both unnatural and futile for colonised peoples to attempt to alter their position or try to bridge the gap between themselves and white Europeans. As biologist Thomas Henry Huxley observed in his widely read essay, 'Emancipation-Black and White (1865), 'no rational man [...] believes that the average negro [...] [can] compete successfully with [...] [or] is the equal, still less the superior, of [...] his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed [white European] rival'.<sup>141</sup> Notably, despite belonging to the 'bigger-brained and smaller-jawed' white European races, the Boers were similarly depicted as being unequal to and incapable of competing successfully with their more advanced British rivals, and as bearing a striking resemblance to the inferior blacks. With reference to adventure fiction and the work of Patrick Brantlinger, I contemplate

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<sup>141</sup> Thomas Henry Huxley, 'Emancipation- Black and White' (1865), Vol. III, p. 20.

nineteenth-century attitudes towards the Boers and pinpoint the extent to which they were connected to scientific expositions on race and to fictional fears about 'going native'. Thus, before identifying the ways in which Schreiner incorporated these theories into her texts, I want to look at each of them in more detail.

Turning firstly to animal analogies, Patricia O' Neill points out in her 2003 'Introduction' to *African Farm*, that many evolutionists used 'observations of animal behaviour' as a means of elucidating and providing analogies to 'patterns' in human progress, variation, development and conduct.<sup>142</sup> Taking this one step further in *Descent of Man* (1871), which Schreiner had read whilst living at the Diamond Fields in 1873, Darwin sought to close the gap between humans and primates and convince his readers that, rather than being two separate species as outlined in the Bible, man was 'constructed on the same general type or model with other mammals'.<sup>143</sup> Highlighting the fact that all 'the bones in his skeleton can be compared with corresponding bones in a monkey, bat or seal' and that the same could be said for his 'muscles, nerves, blood-vessels and internal viscera', Darwin makes it clear that he believed that there were no fundamental emotional, mental or physical differences between man and mammals.<sup>144</sup> Not only were they structurally similar- to the extent that they were afflicted by many of the same diseases- but they also had several 'instincts' in common: for example, wonder, curiosity, imitation, attention, memory, love, companionship, imagination and reason. Yet, as Darwin points out in *Descent*, these instincts were present in some animals and not in others- for example, the more complex emotions, like reason, were present only in animals such as dogs and primates- and varied considerably from species to species.

Arguing that the same process occurred in humans, Darwin makes it apparent that the more civilised (white European) nations presented a 'greater range of character [such as a higher level of intellect, reasoning and moral fibre] than the members of [black] barbarous nations [who still believed in witchcraft and human sacrifice]'.<sup>145</sup> Proclaiming that both the civilised and barbarous nations had graduated from an 'ape-like progenitor'- and that the 'gorilla and chimpanzee [...] [were] now man's nearest allies'- Darwin contended that the further a race had evolved from its early ancestor, the

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<sup>142</sup> 'Introduction', in *African Farm*, p. 26.

<sup>143</sup> Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man: Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>144</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 15.

<sup>145</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 46.

greater its ethnic supremacy and vice versa.<sup>146</sup> By dispensing with God and replacing him with an ‘ape-like’ progenitor, and by stressing the common ancestry between men and primates, Darwin, once again, challenged the widely held religious and social beliefs of his day and provoked the vitriol and censure of both his readers and his peers. Not only was *Descent* denounced as ‘flawed’ and Darwin himself heavily criticised for failing to provide any real evidence to back up his claims, but also Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer of natural selection, inferred in *Darwinism* (1889) that while man’s body may have developed from a lower form of animal, his intellectual and moral faculties had not. Commenting on the rigidity of natural selection and on the sporadic and divergent nature of these faculties- which he believed were influenced by an individual’s principles and beliefs and had produced the martyr, philanthropist and the patriot- Wallace avers that scientists needed to find ‘some origin [...] wholly distinct from that which has served to account for [...] animal characteristics’.<sup>147</sup> However, Darwin was not alone in promulgating the view that humans and primates had originated from a similar ancestral form. Not only did Huxley seemingly verify the ‘structural unity’ between man and apes in *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (1863) but anatomist Richard Owen also maintained that he could not ‘shut [his] eyes to the significance of that all-pervading similitude--every tooth, every bone, strictly homologous- [...] between *Homo* and *Pithecus*’.<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, at the same time as Huxley and Owen were investigating the significance of anatomical similarities between humans and anthropoid apes, scientists, such as Sir Francis Galton, craniologist Samuel George Morton and clinical surgeon Paul Broca were using skulls- including those of apes- to construct a linear hierarchy of the earth’s white and black races.

Believing that the shape and capacity of skulls provided them with ‘irrefutable’ evidence of racial superiority/inferiority, they assumed that the bigger the brain, the greater the intelligence and fitness of a particular ethnic group. Unsurprisingly, they ‘found’ that the white European races, especially the English, possessed the largest brains. Therefore, they were clearly worthy of their place at the top of anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza’s ‘Morphological Tree of the Human Race’ (1890) whilst their ‘unequal’ black counterparts, the ‘Hottentots’, ‘Bushmen’ and ‘Negros’, languished at

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<sup>146</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 182.

<sup>147</sup> Alfred Russel Wallace, *Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection, with some of its Applications* (1889) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 473.

<sup>148</sup> Richard Owen, ‘On the Characters, &c. of the Class Mammalia’ (1857), quoted in Alan P. Barr, ed., *The Major Prose of Thomas Henry Huxley* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 152.



the bottom. This aesthetic positioning of the races- and the blacks' lowly placement upon it- led to a second, more decisive pictorial ranking system, 'The Family Group of the Katarrhinen' (1902), which chronicled the history of human racial development from the primordial past to the present day, through a series of twelve images.<sup>149</sup> Charting the ways in which man's skull had progressed from that of an ape to that of Apollo Belvedere, a late fourth century Greek sculpture that epitomised cultural and intellectual achievement, the diagram undoubtedly advocates white evolutionary supremacy whilst suggesting that the blacks were nearest to and most closely resembled their ape-like ancestors. As German anthropologist, E. Huschke, affirmed in 1854, 'The negro possesses [...] the type of brain found in higher apes'.<sup>150</sup> However, as 'The Family Group of the Katarrhinen' suggests, cranial capacity was not the only method scientists used to gauge and grade superior and inferior racial characteristics. They also measured physical attributes, including the protrusion of the lips and jaw, the flatness of the nose, the brownness of the skin, the length of the forearms and the straightness of the hair. Predictably, these carefully selected criteria, which not only helped scientists to identify inferior external features, but also assisted them in demarcating inferior personality types- targeted and discriminated against the 'savage' black races, and drew attention to their ape-like characteristics and behaviour.

These theories were applied to groups other than the blacks. In *Harper's* magazine (1851), for example, the Irish, who were regarded as responsible for an outbreak of violence and tuberculosis in New York during the 1850s, were described as simian-like, with protruding teeth and short upturned noses. In addition, they were attacked for their sheep-like dependency on the Catholic faith. In calling attention to this trait, journalists, scientists and cartoonists replicated arguments made by Darwin in *Descent*. Building upon hypotheses that he had posited in *The Origin of Species* (1859)- in which he maintained that it was essential to keep fleece colour pure and 'destroy every lamb with the faintest trace of black'- Darwin uses *Descent* to link them to humans.<sup>151</sup> Whilst seemingly advocating the destruction of 'every' individual with this trace of black- he claims that barbarians would be swept away by civilised nations and that 'half-castes' were prone to premature death and infertility- it similarly becomes

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<sup>149</sup> For the diagram of Mantegazza's 'Morphological Tree' and the diagram of 'The Family Group of Katarrhinen', see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 38-39.

<sup>150</sup> Quoted in Stephen Jay Gould, *The Richness of Life* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), pp. 514-515.

<sup>151</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origins of Species* (1859) (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), p. 67.

apparent that Darwin thought it was necessary to eradicate all Europeans who were in 'any marked manner inferior'.<sup>152</sup> Viewing the insane, weak, criminal and profligate as obstacles to racial progress- and criticising the aid and support given to these groups, such as asylums, poor laws and vaccines- Darwin endeavours to get to the root cause behind their 'highly injurious natures'. Alluding to the breeding of domestic animals, he proclaims that such dispositions have tended to appear and reappear 'through reversion, such as blackness in sheep'. He notes:

[W]ith mankind some of the worst dispositions, which occasionally without any assignable cause make their appearance in families, may perhaps be reversions to a savage state, from which we are not removed by very many generations. This view seems indeed recognised in the common expression that such men are the black sheep of the family.<sup>153</sup>

Although Darwin is talking about genetic reversion without an 'assignable cause' here, like the occasional black sheep being born into a white herd, Victorian adventure fiction endeavoured to explain the origins of the Boers regression to a savage state and their inadvertent role as the black sheep of the white European family. Throughout the late-nineteenth century, adventure writers, such as Joseph Conrad and Charles Reade, were preoccupied with the effect that the Dark Continent would have on its white middle-class heroes. Fearing that close contact with the black Africans would cause them to backslide morally and racially, these writers were frequently haunted by the real possibility of their protagonists' 'going native' and reverting to a 'savage state'. One of the most famous examples of this is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in which trader and would-be civiliser, Kurtz, abandons his 'superior', white English ideals and submits to the black barbarism, lust and depravity of the Congo. Despite not being the only character to 'go native', many of his literary counterparts- including his foil, Marlow- manfully resist temptation, convert the 'heathen' and are visibly repulsed by those who embrace Africa's 'darkness'.

Whereas Brantlinger maintains, in *Rule of Darkness* (1988), that 'going native could happen to anyone', in adventure fiction it seems to only affect the occasional Englishman and is more likely to impact on 'entire [European] societies', such as the

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<sup>152</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 163.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

Boers.<sup>154</sup> In Charles Reade's *A Simpleton* (1873), British protagonist, Christopher Staines, is horrified to discover that the 'entire' Boer nation has degenerated into a 'society' of 'white savages'. Not only are they 'moody, silent and brainless', but they also dwell in dirt-ridden huts with 'raw flesh drying on the rafters, stinking skins in a corner [and] parasitical vermin of all sorts blackening the[ir] floor'.<sup>155</sup> Yet, as Reade points out, it is not just the floors that are being 'blackened'. Treating South Africa as a 'parasitical vermin' that had sucked the 'whiteness' out of the Boers- his superior English protagonists are immune to and free from all signs of contamination- he makes clear that they have been blackened both inside and out. Indeed, not only do their dirty exteriors hint at a literal attempt at darkening their white skins, but also their dim-witted and sullen demeanours suggest they have adopted characteristics more commonly associated with the 'natives'. By focusing attention on their 'meaty' surroundings, and their obvious penchant for 'raw flesh' and 'stinking skins', Reade turns the mundane into something sinister and in doing so links the Boers to the nadir of savagery, cannibalism. During the mid-nineteenth century, Britain was besieged with lurid accounts of African man-eaters feeding on 'partially cut-up bodies [...] some with steaks cut from the thighs [...] others [with] the entrails or the head removed, [depending on] the taste of the individual savage'.<sup>156</sup> Whereas readers would have been conscious that the flesh hanging in the Boer's 'huts' was not human, Reade cleverly plays on their fears by making it seem as if it could be. Inferring that the Boers' association with the Dark Continent had left them so defiled that cannibalism was the next logical step in their racial disintegration, Reade suggests that to all intents and purposes, they had become black sheep in white men's clothing. Building on the former notion in *African Farm*, in which Tant' Sannie dreams about sheep's trotters and metaphorically devours her husbands with the same alarming rapidity, I analyse the extent to which Schreiner adheres to Darwinist ideas on race and treats her Boer protagonists' as black sheep in white men's clothing.

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<sup>154</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (New York: Cornell University, 1988), p. 193.

<sup>155</sup> Charles Reade, *A Simpleton* (1873) (Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2012), p. 191.

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Brantlinger, p. 260.

From *African Farm* to *Thoughts*: Schreiner's Changing Views on the Boers and the British

Published by Chapman and Hall in 1883, *African Farm* was, as we have seen in the introduction, an international best-seller and brought Schreiner world-wide acclaim. Telling the story of the lives of three young European children- the feminist Lyndall, the artistic Waldo and the placid Em- and their experiences on an upcountry farm in the drought-ridden Karroo, *African Farm* not only examines their individual struggles, but also their mutual misery at the hands of the merciless and racially backward Tant' Sannie. Although condemned by some of her contemporaries as immoral and blasphemous- because of its rejection of God and pregnant Lyndall's refusal to marry her lover- it was praised for its far-sighted vision of female independence and its use of science as a means of explicating Waldo's loss of faith and fears about the hereafter. Whilst numerous critics have looked closely at Waldo's crisis of faith, and have concentrated on putting that and Lyndall's quest for sexual equality into its wider nineteenth-century context, I look at how their struggles bring them into juxtaposition with the pre-modern Tant' Sannie.

Turning firstly to her sheep-like devotion to the ideals, manners and biblical literalism of her ancestors, as Tant' Sannie sanctimoniously explains to her stepdaughter, Em:

I may have my sins, but I do remember the tenth commandment: 'Honour thy father and thy mother that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayst live long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee'.<sup>157</sup>

As I illustrate, this quote- and Schreiner's inclusion of it- highlights what she considers to be one of the root causes of racial inequality between the British and the Boers: the latter's dogged determination to cling to their fathers' and mothers' 'ultra-literal' interpretation of the Bible and outdated Calvinist beliefs. Not only does Tant' Sannie steadfastly refuse to 'find out things that [her parents] never knew, and do things in a way that they never did them', but, in doing so, she also illustrates the Boers' organic incapacity to adapt to progress and change.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, whereas Tant' Sannie baulks at

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<sup>157</sup> *African Farm*, pp. 277-278.

<sup>158</sup> *African Farm*, p. 278.

new inventions, decrees that marriage and children are the ‘best things the Lord can give’ and loathes any book except her Bible and hymn-book, Lyndall and the German Waldo reject orthodox religion, rebel against conventional gender roles and seek comfort in knowledge and science.<sup>159</sup> Inspecting these in turn, in comparison to Tant’ Sannie, who dedicates herself to pleasing an ‘unseen auditor’ and following his preordained plan- her subsequent marriage to Piet Vander Walt is based on a vision from God- an increasingly sceptical Waldo challenges the validity of her biblical literalism and questions the likelihood of an entity ‘whom our prayers can alter’.<sup>160</sup> Tormented, at night, by images of a great multitude weaving their way towards Hell, Waldo entreats God to send fire down from Heaven and burn his sacrificial mutton chop. The Lord’s failure to do so and live up to the promise outlined in Matthew 21:22, ‘whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer [...] ye shall receive’, undoubtedly ignites the crisis that haunts Waldo throughout the novel and brings him into sharp contrast with the unquestioning Tant’ Sannie. Turning to books, such as Mill’s *Political Economy* (1848), to aid him through this crisis, it is important to note that, whilst its ideas on alternative forms of social organisation cause Waldo to quiver with excitement, Tant’ Sannie instantly dismisses it as the Devil’s work and readily assents to its being burnt. Virtuously decreeing that it would call down the vengeance of God, she not only points up the Boers’ inability to envisage any narrative of progress outside of the Bible, but also inadvertently fails to make the connection between her deep-rooted suspicion of scientific advancements and the death of her livestock. Whereas Waldo is keen to modernise life on the farm, and spends nine months building a prototype of a sheep shearing machine, Tant’ Sannie rails against any of the advancements that would be of benefit to either its human or animal inhabitants. As she complains to Em, ‘Let them make their steam-waggons and their fire-carriages; let them go on as though the dear Lord didn’t know what he was about when He gave horses and oxen legs’.<sup>161</sup> Similarly horrified at Em’s suggestion that marriage may not suit everyone, Tant’ Sannie’s conservative attitude to wedlock and to traditional gender roles accentuates the undeniable differences between herself and the more progressive Lyndall. Indeed, on the same day as the Boer-woman is preparing to wed Piet, whose attraction indubitably lies in his two farms and twelve thousand sheep, Lyndall is dreaming of a future where

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<sup>159</sup> *African Farm*, p. 277.

<sup>160</sup> *African Farm*, p. 150.

<sup>161</sup> *African Farm*, p. 278.

‘love is no more bought or sold [...] [and] is not [just] a means of making bread’.<sup>162</sup> Unlike Tant’ Sannie who deems it a grievous sin for a woman to stay unmarried- as she exclaims to Em, ‘If the beloved Redeemer didn’t mean men to have wives what did He make women for?’- Lyndall cannot contemplate marriage while the sexes remain on unequal terms.<sup>163</sup> As she declares to the recently betrothed Em, ‘I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man’s foot [...] There are other women glad of such work’.<sup>164</sup> Although her desire to know everything, which she sees as the only means of escaping this fate, ends in disaster- she confesses that her four years at boarding-school were designed to cultivate imbecility and weakness- it is notable that, unlike the thrice-married Tant’ Sannie, she can envisage a higher and more ideal form of marriage.

By emphasising their radically diverse attitudes towards wedlock and religion, and apportioning them to an English girl, a German boy and a middle-aged Boer woman, Schreiner makes it abundantly clear that their differences fall along racial lines. This is reinforced by her adoption of one of the literary customs of her day, the identification of characters according to race and ethnicity. In doing so, Schreiner forces her readers to treat each racial group as a separate entity, with its own distinct and identifiable set of ‘follies and virtues’. She also alerts them to the fact that some groups naturally possess a more superior mix of these attributes than others. Echoing the theories laid out in Darwin’s *Descent*, Schreiner’s mouthpiece, Lyndall, notes to Waldo:

[S]ometimes it amuses me intensely to trace out the resemblance between one man and another: to see how Tant’ Sannie and I, [and] you and Bonaparte [...] are one and the same compound, merely mixed in different proportions. What is microscopic in one is largely developed in another; what is a rudimentary in one man is an active organ in another [...] And sometimes what is more amusing still [...] is to trace the analogy there always is between the progress and development of one individual and of a whole nation; or again, between a single nation and the entire human race.<sup>165</sup>

By using Lyndall to ‘trace out the resemblance’ between herself and Tant’ Sannie, and between Waldo and Bonaparte, Schreiner not only conveys to her readers that the children are more superior and ‘largely developed’ than the Boer woman and the

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<sup>162</sup> *African Farm*, p. 191.

<sup>163</sup> *African Farm*, pp. 276-277.

<sup>164</sup> *African Farm*, p. 181.

<sup>165</sup> *African Farm*, p. 194.

peripatetic Irish interloper, but also that the progress of each individual is representative of their 'whole nation'. Whilst later maintaining that Bonaparte and Tant' Sannie were 'shamefully exaggerated' caricatures who should not be 'regarded as an attack upon the nation whose nationality [they] shared', it is difficult not to reach the opposite conclusion given that their follies make them susceptible to violence and to being blackened by the 'natives'.<sup>166</sup> Turning firstly to the former, it is notable that Tant' Sannie's violent behaviour is usually directed at her 'Kaffir' servants. Not only does she turn out the wife and six-day-old child of a 'Kaffir' herdsman who is suspected of stealing sheep, but Lyndall also makes the point that, while she herself responded with dignity to a 'Kaffir' maid spilling coffee on her arm, Tant' Sannie 'would have thrown the saucer at her and sworn for an hour'.<sup>167</sup> What is important about this is, despite admitting that both women would have experienced the 'same irritated displeasure', it is only the Boer Tant' Sannie, with her 'rudimentary buddings' of conscience, sophistication and tolerance, who would have resorted to bad language and aggression. Arguing that this response was typical of her 'whole nation', Schreiner uses it to reaffirm the superiority of the British, and simultaneously links Tant' Sannie's behaviour to contemporary assertions about the Boers' resemblance to and racist attitude towards the blacks.

Not only does this racism manifest itself in cruel acts towards individuals, but it is also evident in her determination to adhere to the diktats of her Calvinist faith. In spite of having an almost affectionate bond with her Hottentot maid, Tant' Sannie undeniably believes that the blacks should never be anything but slaves and that South Africa was the Boers' promised land. As she identified in her earlier speech to Em, in which she observed that by honouring her mother and father she 'mayst live long in the land which the Lord thy God had giveth thee', her ancestors had, during their nomadic Great Trek to the interior, become aware of the similarities between themselves and the Jews in the Wilderness. Regarding themselves, therefore, as God's chosen people, they were of the opinion that He had sanctified both their society and their behaviour, including their summary expulsion, mistreatment and extermination of the blacks. Employing orthodox religion as a means of exploring the darker side of colonialism-Bonaparte similarly assumes the role and authority of God to beat and imprison Waldo-

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<sup>166</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to William Philip ("Will") Schreiner, 1896, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 8-9.

<sup>167</sup> *African Farm*, p. 194.

it is interesting to note that it is Tant' Sannie's faith that causes her to behave in a savage manner and fulfil her position as the black sheep of the European family. Before looking at the ways in which she fulfils this role, I delve briefly into Schreiner's depiction of the 'natives'. Whilst it is Tant' Sannie who draws explicit parallels between the 'Kaffirs' and their ape-like progenitors, as a means of forbidding them from attending Sunday services and proving that they 'needed no salvation', Schreiner rarely paints her black protagonists in a positive light. Tant' Sannie's 'Hottentot' maid is a particularly unsympathetic character, who delights in the suffering of others, and Schreiner describes a pregnant 'Kaffir' maid as 'sullen [and] ill-looking, with lips hideously protruding'.<sup>168</sup> In doing so, she highlights her own racism and acknowledge the anatomical features that 'distinguished' the blacks from the white Europeans. Whereas much has been made of her employment of derogatory terms, such as 'Kaffir' and 'Hottentot', I agree with Joyce Avrech Berkman that Schreiner uses them as a neutral method of grouping South Africa's black races together.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, by stressing the violence of Tant' Sannie and cunning of Bonaparte, it is apparent that she sees the blacks as the victims of white colonialism rather than as a corrupting influence over the Boers. Not only are they cast in subservient roles and subject to regular beatings, but they are also frequently expelled from their own land. As I argue in Chapter Three, black oppression, exploitation and the negative effects of white colonialism are themes that Schreiner returns to and builds upon in her political writing. Yet, what is notable about its inclusion here is that, whilst Schreiner was convinced that the blacks possessed social and biological reasons for their inferiority, she wanted to demonstrate that the Boers were responsible for allowing themselves to fulfil their role as the black sheep of the white European family.

As I illustrate, Tant' Sannie fulfils this role in two ways. Firstly, like the Boers in Reade's *The Simpleton*, she has degenerated into a 'savage' both physically and morally. Not only is she dirty, and regularly sleeps in the same clothes, but she is also sullen, aggressive, uneducated and unintelligent. As we have seen, these latter characteristics, and her moral semblance to the blacks, has occurred as a result of her dependency on her ancestors' beliefs and ideals. In addition, like her 'native' counterparts, Tant' Sannie is plagued by a penchant for raw flesh. As in *The Simpleton*,

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<sup>168</sup> *African Farm*, p. 94.

<sup>169</sup> Joyce Avrech Berkman, *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner: Beyond South African Colonialism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 87.



she stores dried mutton skins in her loft and dreams of getting sheep bones stuck in her throat. Contrasting her consumption of sheep's trotters with her appetite for mates- she 'buries husbands one after another [...] folds her hands resignedly [...] and [...] looks for another'- Schreiner plainly links Tant' Sannie's man-eating ways with the nadir of savagery, cannibalism.<sup>170</sup> Whilst accentuating this connection for comedic effect, Schreiner wants to impress upon her readers how far the Boers have regressed and how uncivilised they are in comparison to their fellow Europeans. Indeed, as in Reade's novel, Schreiner's superior English and German protagonists remain 'white' and unadulterated by their surroundings. Despite Tant' Sannie's endeavours to convert her servants to Calvinism, her own faith is riddled with black folklore and superstitions, and Schreiner uses this to show the ease with which she casts aside orthodox religion and becomes convinced that she was being haunted by spirits. Echoing behaviour usually accredited to blacks- in *Descent*, Darwin infers that they struggled to differentiate between subjective and objective impressions- Tant' Sannie not only refuses to beat Em for breaking a plate for fear of upsetting her dead husband, but also dreams that a 'dark shadow with outstretched wings fled slowly over her house'.<sup>171</sup> Whereas the presence of this shadow coincides with the death of Old Otto, Waldo's father and overseer of the farm, who loses his home and position as a result of the machinations of Bonaparte, I believe that it also represents the darkness hanging over Tant' Sannie and the Boer race. Indeed, whilst this darkness stems, in part, from their proximity to the 'natives', and from their refusal to bring their rate of progress into line with their fellow Europeans, Schreiner similarly uses it to reaffirm their role as black sheep by accentuating their ovine characteristics.

Although describing the blacks as 'woolly-headed', little better than cattle and expected to obey orders without question, Schreiner wants her readers to make the connection between sheep and the Boers' aversion to change, dogged pursuit of the path carved out by their elders and dependency on the guidance of their shepherd. Aside from their obvious ovine personality traits, there is also a strong physical likeness between the weak-eyed, white-haired Piet and Tant' Sannie's phantasmagorical 'beast like a sheep, with red eyes'.<sup>172</sup> Whilst Tant' Sannie assumes that her vision of killing this beast 'meant marriage'- as she joyfully tells her maid: 'The dear Lord doesn't send

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<sup>170</sup> *African Farm*. p. 191.

<sup>171</sup> *African Farm*, p. 102.

<sup>172</sup> *African Farm*, p. 197.

dreams for nothing [...] Wasn't the [beast's] white wool [Piet's] hair, and the red eyes his weak eyes' - Schreiner employs it to make important observations about the Boers and the British.<sup>173</sup> The most notable of these revolves around Piet's 'weak eyes' and the Boers' literal and metaphorical inability to see. Pointedly alluding, on several occasions, to Lyndall's 'clear' eyes, Schreiner implies that, in comparison to the 'weak-eyed' Boers who only have a 'microscopic' degree of sight, the British are intellectually and visually perspicacious; their 'eyes' are an 'active' and 'largely developed' organ. Indeed, when Bonaparte arrives on the farm and begins to ingratiate himself with its inhabitants, it is Lyndall, rather than the middle-aged Boer-woman, who instantly sees through his tales of heroism and woe and rightly identifies him as the archetypal wolf in sheep's clothing. As she disdainfully avers to Otto, 'how do we know that [his stories are] true [...] I think he is a liar'.<sup>174</sup> However, for Tant' Sannie- who allows the conniving Bonaparte to seduce her and take control of her farm- the truth only becomes apparent when she overhears him propositioning her niece, Trana. Secreted in the attic, where she has been busy dividing salt mutton into pieces, it seems apt that she drenches the swindling Bonaparte with a 'stream of cold pickle-water, heavy with [sheep] ribs' and pelts him with a 'shoulder of mutton'.<sup>175</sup> Although it appears as if Tant' Sannie's growing awareness of Bonaparte's true intentions enables her to shed some of her ovine characteristics, Schreiner instead infers that her sheep-like stupidity renders her incapable of viewing a situation correctly unless the evidence is directly in front of her.

In keeping with Lyndall's earlier assertion that the development of 'one individual' is analogous to that of a 'whole nation', Schreiner makes it apparent that Tant' Sannie's blindness is shared by both her God-fearing husband and her 'pudgy' niece- who later marries Bonaparte- and will endure through her 'pudding-faced, weak-eyed child'.<sup>176</sup> Arguing that the perpetuation of a blind faith in God and blindness to the changing world has led and is still leading the Boers into an ultra-conservative cultural vacuum, Schreiner contends that they cannot and will not progress whilst they cling to insuperable barriers to individual and racial advancement. As Waldo's stranger points out:

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<sup>173</sup> *African Farm*, p. 197.

<sup>174</sup> *African Farm*, p. 67; p. 72.

<sup>175</sup> *African Farm*, p. 132.

<sup>176</sup> *African Farm*, p. 276.

Habits have fastened on them from which nothing but death can free them; [...] which feed on the intellect like a worm sapping energy, hope, creative power, all that makes a man higher than a beast- leaving only the power [...] to sink lower in the abyss.<sup>177</sup>

It is notable, however, that by the time Schreiner published *Thoughts*, her attitude towards the Boers' 'habits', blindness and apparent lack of advancement had changed completely. Rather than berating them for their 'worm-sapping' adherence to the past and their idolatry of the Bible- and holding these traits up as evidence of their descent into the 'abyss'- she instead claims that their conservatism exemplifies their 'powerful' determination not to lose themselves in the 'barbarism about [them], and so sink in the scale of being'.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, not only does their devotion to the Bible keep them connected to the 'higher spiritual and intellectual life of the human race', but also their resistance to change shelters them from the excesses and degradation of the materially driven nineteenth century.<sup>179</sup> Expressing her fears that the Boers will be persuaded to renounce their grip on their past and 'accept the new', Schreiner implores 'Oom and Tante' to preserve their customs, faith and 'simple modes of life' until they know what they are 'exchanging them for'.<sup>180</sup> Whereas in *African Farm*, Schreiner believes that the Boers would benefit from exchanging their outdated, backward values for the knowledge and ideals espoused by Lyndall and Waldo- who gets most of his ideas from British writers- in *Thoughts*, she avers that the 'Boer has [...] perhaps much more, to teach us than we to teach him'.<sup>181</sup> No longer viewing the British as the 'best people on earth' and the Boers as a 'tumour sap[ping] at the strength' of the human race, Schreiner argues that if man is to reach his full potential, he must turn to the 'simple living and high thinking' of the Boers rather than to the tutelage of Empire.<sup>182</sup> However, as her earlier novel *Undine* reaffirms, Schreiner's change in attitude towards South Africa's two white races- and conviction that the Boers were like a tumour sapping away at the entire human race- did not occur during her time as a governess or before her sojourn in Europe.

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<sup>177</sup> *African Farm*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>178</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 224.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 225.

<sup>181</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 283.

<sup>182</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 233; p. 236.

### From *Undine* to *Thoughts*: Schreiner's Fears about Going Boer

In this section, I again consider Schreiner's usage of and dependency on the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spencer. As I argue, as well as employing them as a means of emphasising the inferiority of the Dutch and supremacy of the British, Schreiner not only uses them to divulge her mounting concerns about the close links between the two races, but also to explicate her fears about the latter 'going Boer'. Indeed, whereas in *African Farm*, Schreiner examines the consequences of the Boers being blackened by their proximity to the natives, in *Undine* she builds on the suppositions outlined in adventure fiction and extends them to encompass the dangers of British settlers living on Boer farms and adopting their lifestyles. In doing so, she emulates the prejudices of her mother, Rebecca, and reminds readers of her early jingoism. Although touching upon these issues in *African Farm*- through the rotund and conventional Em- in *Undine* she expands upon and originates ideas on Boer and British hybridism that she would ultimately redress, invert and revisit in *Thoughts* and several of her later political works. In these works, Schreiner believed that their sexual and cultural intermingling would result in the great South African nation of the future. However, as I show through Undine's stepfamily and the marriage and offspring of Mr and Mrs Snappercaps, this was something that she did not subscribe to in the 1870s, during which time she remained convinced that any intermingling between the two races would lead to the erosion of British supremacy.

Published several years after Schreiner's death, by her husband Cronwright, *Undine* deals with its eponymous heroine's crisis of faith, her love for the cold and callous Albert Blair and her struggle for economic independence. Dismissed by critics as juvenile, unrealistic and incapable of reconciling Undine's battle for equality with its romance plot, I nonetheless believe that it offers valuable insights into Schreiner's early attitudes towards race.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, whilst opening her novel with an idyllic description of a Dutch farmhouse bathed in the 'cold white light of an almost full moon', it is not long before she touches upon the anti-Boer sentiments familiar to readers of *African Farm*. As she concedes in the first few paragraphs, even the 'veriest sheep-souled Boer that ever smoked pipe or wore vel-skoen' would admire the 'strange weird beauty' of this scene if he 'had but one ray of light left in him'.<sup>184</sup> By alluding to the Boer as 'sheep-

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<sup>183</sup> Burdett, p. 15.

<sup>184</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Undine* (1929) (Milton Keynes: Dodo Press, 2010), p. 1.

souled', she evokes the ovine imagery used to such critical effect in *African Farm*, and establishes, from the outset, the hard lined, Darwinist approach she takes towards her 'dim-witted' Boer protagonists. Like their counterparts in *African Farm*, she treats them, and their behaviour, as evidence of their racial inferiority. The most ample illustration of this is Schreiner's depiction of the indistinguishable Annie and Sannie, the 'grey-eyed, yellow-haired, pudding-faced', conventional little Dutch girls who share a governess with Undine.<sup>185</sup> Regarding them- and the entire Boer race- as an indivisible entity without a perceivable identity of their own, Schreiner claims that the sisters 'inconvertibly [prove] their Africander origin' through their 'earnest patronage of mutton chops and fat' and sheep-like dedication to their Bible lessons and hymnbooks.<sup>186</sup> Notably, these lessons take place in Undine's home, an old Boer farmhouse, which 'in spite of [...] being filled with [English] books, had an uncomfortably Dutch appearance'.<sup>187</sup> Whilst this comment seems innocuous, and is consistent with her ongoing xenophobia, it also hints at Schreiner's true agenda in *Undine*. Whereas in *African Farm*, she launches a blistering attack on the uneducated 'Tant' Sannie and openly sneers at her aversion to learning, in *Undine*, she turns her attention to the more progressive Dutch South Africans, who wanted their children to be instructed, according to the *Cradock Register* (1880), in "'the branches of a sound English education'".<sup>188</sup> Rather than rejoice at their efforts to raise themselves racially and place themselves on an equal educational footing with the British- Annie and Sannie embrace ideas that are 'truly correct, feminine, and orthodox' and endeavour to study the Bible in English- Schreiner makes it clear that their efforts are in vain and they will remain 'uncomfortably Dutch'.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, although they are adept at mimicking conventional English behaviour- they rise early to fix their hair, adhere to a strict dress code and are never late for prayers- they are incapable of independent thought, relying wholly on the governance of a shepherdess, and exhibit only the smallest amount of animation and intellect. Unlike the self-reliant and intelligent Undine who finds herself consumed by a religious crisis and rebels wildly against gender norms, the ovine Annie and Sannie never doubt the legitimacy of their religious teachings and blindly conform to their assigned roles.

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<sup>185</sup> *Undine*, p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Undine*, p. 8.

<sup>187</sup> *Undine*, p. 2.

<sup>188</sup> Quoted in Schoeman, *A Woman in South Africa*, p. 305.

<sup>189</sup> *Undine*, p. 9.

Introducing ideas and behaviours that are duplicated in *African Farm*, Schreiner makes it evident that, like Tant' Sannie, Annie and Sannie are not only unable to understand the English girl's sedition and overriding sense of frustration, but they also do not have enough wisdom to comprehend fully the ideologies of their own faith. When studying Matthew Chapter 25, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins- which urges readers to be prepared, at all times, for the second coming of the Lord- each girl is required to ask pertinent questions about its content and meaning. In comparison to Undine, who immediately understands its intent and queries the fairness of a God who stands in judgement on the world and sends non-believers to Hell, the apathetic Annie and Sannie struggle with the task and exhaust 'all the powers of their mind' inquiring about the virgins' sex and apparel. Incapable of seeing beyond the superficial elements of the tale, they spend most of the lesson 'gazing at the face of [their] oracle with an expression of hopeless vacancy'.<sup>190</sup> In order to examine this 'vacancy' and 'uncomfortable Dutch-ness' further, Schreiner cleverly echoes Darwinist thought by drawing distinctions between the three children and Undine's only friend, Socrates the ape. Tied up in the yard for the majority of the day, he adopts the same air of deep philosophical thought and grave facial expressions as his mistress. He similarly revels in his brief taste of liberty, clambering around on the roof, when Undine accidentally allows him to escape. Whilst Socrates' exploits indubitably resemble those of the 'wild' and disgruntled Undine- they both revolt against their physical and social constraints, yearn for freedom and allegedly understand each other completely- he is also more vibrant, intellectual and emotional than both Africander girls put together. By emphasising the ape's despair, disdain, elation, rebelliousness and quizzical nature and by stressing the Boers' gullibility, stupidity and blank facial expressions, Schreiner makes it apparent that Socrates is better at imitating a superior being (the English Undine) and is more human than any of her Dutch protagonists. Thus, it not only appears that the Dutch are much lower on the evolutionary scale than the British- regardless of their attempts to raise themselves and rectify their situation- but also that they have degenerated to such an extent that they have become the social inferiors of and have effectively swapped positions with Socrates the ape.

Whereas in *African Farm*, this level of degeneracy and inferiority is peculiar to the Boers, in *Undine*, Schreiner points out that they are not the only race suffering from

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<sup>190</sup> *Undine*, p. 11.

this affliction. Targeting the scores of British immigrants (like Undine's stepfather) who have made lives for themselves on farms previously owned by the Boers, she argues that it is not just Annie, Sannie and its furnishings that give Undine's home its 'uncomfortably Dutch' veneer, several of its English inhabitants have embraced an unnervingly Dutch way of life. Whilst, in *African Farm*, the British are unaffected by and rise above their associations with the Boers- even Em, who physically resembles Tant' Sannie and regularly seeks her counsel, is ultimately disillusioned by marriage to the effeminate Gregory Rose- in *Undine*, the English live in Boer homes, usurp Boer jobs and have assumed similar personality traits. Indeed, with the exception of Undine and her 'fair little mamma', who has retained the characteristics that make her quintessentially and indisputably British- she is depicted as both 'delicate' and 'refined'- the farm's occupants have become 'uncomfortably Dutch' and have reverted to a primitive and archaic level of being.<sup>191</sup> By alluding to Undine's stepfather and stepbrother, Frank, as English Africanders- a term commonly used to describe English South Africans- Schreiner cunningly accentuates their dual ethnicity, which, she claims, is an undoubted consequence of their racial regression and stresses their connection and similarities to the antiquated Boers. Like Tant' Sannie, Undine's stepfather rules his farm with an 'iron fist' and takes great pleasure in bullying his black herdsmen. He is also lazy and saunters aimlessly about the place 'till the heat [...] drive[s] him in'.<sup>192</sup> More importantly, his life, and the lives of everyone residing on the farm, revolves around religion and the reader first encounters Undine's stepfather sitting silently in front of an open Bible and prayer book. Keeping these tomes on a well-lit table in the centre of the room, he not only preserves a long-standing Boer tradition, by giving God pride of place in their home, but also shines a spotlight on his own racial deficiencies. Having seemingly allowed his British traits to have been eroded, and replaced, by numerous Boer-isms, Undine's stepfather has left himself, as the narrator scathingly points out, with no firm identity- he is not given a name- and 'with nothing worthy of remark about him'.<sup>193</sup> Using the term worthy here to mean British, Schreiner similarly looks at the impact that the Africander lifestyle has had on Undine's stepbrother Frank. Whilst mystified by the religious fanaticism surrounding him and amused by the prospect of 'being sent to fire and brimstone', Frank is too indolent to develop these

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<sup>191</sup> *Undine*, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> *Undine*, p. 9.

<sup>193</sup> *Undine*, p. 3.

ideas further and make the most of his intellectual and racial superiority.<sup>194</sup> Preferring to spend time enjoying himself or ‘reclining on his back’, he informs a desolate Undine that although he is aware of ‘people who don’t believe the Bible is true [...] and [...] write books [about it]’, he feels that it is far ‘too much bother’ to actually study them for himself.<sup>195</sup> Following his declaration that he will read them ‘when I’m a man’, he promptly pulls his hat over his eyes and goes to sleep.<sup>196</sup> What is notable about this is that Schreiner uses Frank’s sluggish demeanour to make significant assertions about him racially. Indeed, although he has been infected by the Boers’ inertia and vindictiveness- he pelts ducks with ‘bits of baked earth’ and belittles Undine’s ‘strange’ ideas and unwomanly behaviour- Schreiner calls attention to the fact that, unlike his father, Frank’s regression from Englishman to Africander is far from complete. Whereas the Boers’ keep their eyes figuratively shut to any form of progress, Frank’s eyes are always half-open to them. Thus, whilst he may appear ‘uncomfortably Dutch’, Schreiner makes the point that Frank’s British superiority has not diminished but is lying dormant, waiting to be awoken. This awakening begins as soon as he sets foot in Britain, where Undine’s grandparents live and where the majority of the novel is set. Here the ‘changed’ Frank dispenses with his more troubling Africander traits and throws his ‘noble’ British self into studying to become a doctor and pursuing a relationship with the pure and beautiful Aunt Margaret.

Before looking at her depiction of Britain in more detail- and the racial parallels that Schreiner draws between Undine’s grandfather and the farm’s inhabitants- I first examine her depiction of Mr and Mrs Snappercaps and their dirty, lazy children. Despite alluding to the wagon driving Mr Snappercaps as a huge, light-eyed ‘English Africander’, the only reference Schreiner makes to his wife’s lineage is that she is the daughter of a ‘Lower Albany farmer’. In *Thoughts*, she seemingly answers this question by informing readers that when the British settlers of 1820 ‘implanted themselves’ on South African soil, they named their villages and districts, including Lower Albany, after the ‘men and places of the old country’.<sup>197</sup> Thus, numerous critics, including Gerald Monsman, Schoeman, Stanley and Cherry Clayton, have concluded that Mrs Snappercaps is British. However, in *Olive Schreiner: Her Friends and Times* (1955), D. L. Hobman disagrees with this and argues that Mrs Snappercaps is a ‘sketch

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<sup>194</sup> *Undine*, p. 24.

<sup>195</sup> *Undine*, p. 18.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 70.



of a Boer woman [...] who, in her narrow spite, is even more unpleasant than Tant' Sannie'.<sup>198</sup> Regardless of whether Mrs Snappercaps is, in fact, Dutch or British, the implications remain the same. In comparison to her husband, who is a good-hearted, good-natured fellow, Mrs Snappercaps has no redeeming features- she is shrewd, callous, greedy and selfish- and has deteriorated to such an extent that she is little better than a 'white savage'. As Undine discovers when she accompanies them on their journey to the New Rush Diamond Fields, Mr and Mrs Snappercaps' racial differences have affected both their marriage and their children. Exploring the ramifications of this, I identify the differences between Mr and Mrs Snappercaps and Undine, and how they measure up against their Dutch compatriots on the farm.

Despite acknowledging that Mr Snappercaps has several laudable qualities and is 'worthy of remark', Schreiner makes it clear that, like the farmer before him, he has developed the type of muscular physique commonly associated with the Boers and has thoroughly immersed himself in their nomadic way of life. As a result, his superior Britishness has been overshadowed by his sluggish, uncouth behaviour and Schreiner places particular emphasis on his 'ignorance', his fondness for alcohol and his inability to make intellectual conversation. By reiterating her earlier comments about the Dutch girls' exhaustible cerebral resources and by alluding to Mr Snappercaps' propensity towards violence, Schreiner cleverly connects him to Sannie, Annie, and Tant' Sannie. As we have seen, Mr Snappercaps is not the only member of his family to be associated with these protagonists. However, in his wife's case, Schreiner ensures that these links are more revealing and overt. Not only is Mrs Snappercaps' relationship with her husband reminiscent of Tant' Sannie's marriage to Piet- she overrides his decisions and ignores his advice- but she also uses the 'instruments' of her Wesleyan faith to try and shame the freethinking Undine, and gain control over those around her. Wanting to extract her 'bread-and-meals worth of labour' from Undine, whom she treats as a drudge, and unable to muster up the energy to rid her offspring of their 'coating of syrup, coffee, sand and flies', it soon becomes apparent that Mrs Snappercaps is too lazy to do anything but eat, sleep, and slap her children.<sup>199</sup> Whilst this boorish and sadistic behaviour reminds readers of Tant' Sannie, and gives credence to the theory that she is a Boer, Schreiner similarly uses it to single out the racial disparities between Mrs Snappercaps and Undine.

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<sup>198</sup> D. L. Hobman, *Olive Schreiner: Her Friends and Times* (London: Watts and Co., 1955), p. 59.

<sup>199</sup> *Undine*, pp. 178-180.

Despite the former's parents having raised the necessary funds to send her to a Grahamstown boarding school, where she learnt to play the piano and make slippers and caps, it is she, and not Undine, who is described as having an 'uncultivated mind'. Although this could be the result of her 'finishing school' tuition, which according to Lyndall, 'finish[es] everything but imbecility and weakness', Schreiner intimates that Mrs Snappercaps' failure to understand the meaning of long dictionary words is racial.<sup>200</sup> By linking her failure to Annie and Sannie's struggle to spell English words, it appears as if Schreiner is either suggesting that Mrs Snappercaps is Dutch, and, therefore, not able to cope with her exclusively English training, or that she is British and her 'uncomfortably Dutch' lifestyle has marred her ability to perform even the simplest of tasks. In addition, Schreiner infers that Mrs Snappercaps' uncomfortable Dutch-ness and lack of superior Englishness has left her unable to oppose, and surmount, the limitations of her faith and sex. As her reaction to Spencer's *First Principles* (1862) shows, Mrs Snappercaps cannot appreciate any viewpoint that falls outside of the realms of conventional society, and point-blank refuses to borrow it from Undine. Although she may not throw it in the fire, she is, however, horrified to discover that Spencer is not affiliated with any church and worries about the impact that such 'monotheistical nonsense' will have on her children.<sup>201</sup> Launching into an enthusiastic attack on Pharisees, hypocrites and non-believers, Mrs Snappercaps not only inadvertently manages to identify some of her own duplicitous tendencies- she has trouble finding her Bible- but also confirms that, in comparison to Undine, her intelligence is, as the narrator caustically remarks, only 'up to [the] Hottentots at least'.<sup>202</sup> This remark follows on the back of Mrs Snappercaps' realisation that their 'Hottentot' leader Jan, who has supposedly been out all day looking for their lost oxen, has, in fact, been sleeping and consuming large quantities of brandy and tobacco. Rather than inform him that the 'Hottentot's' 'limp and air of extreme dejection' is a sham, she instead allows her husband to give him a 'good feed' and then spend six days searching for the cattle himself. What is interesting about this is that, rather than criticising Mr Snappercaps for his naivety and lack of judgement, Schreiner instead calls attention to the fact that his wife uncovers this deception so quickly because it is indicative of her own behaviour. Indeed, she frequently pretends to be asleep so she can

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<sup>200</sup> *African Farm*, p. 182.

<sup>201</sup> *Undine*, p. 190.

<sup>202</sup> *Undine*, p. 186.

spy on her husband and Undine, and garner evidence of the latter's 'wrong doing'. By highlighting the similarities between Mrs Snappercaps and the 'unusually apish' Jan, Schreiner demonstrates how far the former has regressed racially. Despite her best efforts her children similarly succumb to the effects of their itinerant Boer existence and close proximity to the 'natives'. As we have seen, they regularly fall asleep with pieces of mutton fat dangling from their mouths and are usually covered in huge quantities of dirt. Thus, regardless of whether Mrs Snappercaps is Dutch or British, and whether her offspring's regression is cultural or sexual, her Boer-isms and hypocritical adherence to the Wesleyan faith will not only endure, but will also hinder her children's racial development and continue to separate them from their more progressive European counterparts.

Notably, Schreiner applies these same arguments to the scandalmongering residents of the fictional Greenwood, who refer to Undine as 'bad' and 'wicked', and to her autocratic grandfather, who threatens to whip her for refusing to attend Wesleyan prayer and revival meetings. Having had no real knowledge of Britain, apart from what she read in novels and had learnt from her parents, Schreiner had to call upon both her experiences as a governess and her conflicts with her family. As I have shown, when confronted with the realities of South African life, British settlers desperately clung to their nineteenth-century values, which often led to their faith and abhorrence of improper feminine conduct being blown out of proportion. Interestingly, in *A Woman in South Africa*, Schoeman claims that Schreiner had based Undine's grandfather on her brother and sister, Theo and Ettie, who were renowned for their puritan religiosity. Not only is this supported by the fact that she called Theo 'oubaas' (boss) and regularly accompanied him to church, but also that their brother Fred declared that he and Ettie were 'not persons; [...] [but] embodiments of certain ideas, feelings, maxims [...] associated with dictatorial autocracy and assertion of infallibility'.<sup>203</sup> Although Undine is criticised for not conforming to these ideas, feelings and maxims, Schreiner intimates that if she had have done she would have dispensed with all that was 'highest and best in herself'.<sup>204</sup> In spite of the obvious similarities between the inhabitants of Greenwood, Undine's stepfamily and Mr and Mrs Snappercaps, I believe that Schreiner is calling attention to two separate racial issues. Whilst Undine's stepfamily and the Snappercaps have been tarnished by their associations with the Boers- as their laziness, physical

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<sup>203</sup> Quoted in Schoeman, *A Woman in South Africa*, p. 168.

<sup>204</sup> *Undine*, p. 99.

appearance and aggressiveness attests- Schreiner infers that the residents of Greenwood have sabotaged all that is best and highest in themselves and have become 'uncomfortably Dutch' by abiding by their prescribed roles and Wesleyan faith. Emphasising the destructive impact that they have had on these residents, and on their individual and racial progress, Schreiner intimates that the British were in real danger of finding themselves stuck in an ethnic rut, and of regressing to the same level as their 'inferior' white neighbours.

Whilst seemingly refuting the theory that her early novels demonstrate her allegiance to the British and prove that she considered them 'superior to all other peoples', it is important to note that, in *Undine*, Schreiner is not criticising them as a race, but is instead attacking their overreliance on the social, sexual and spiritual mores outlined above. By identifying the ways in which her protagonists rise above these mores- Undine achieves economic independence and Lyndall refuses to marry a man she does not love- Schreiner was convinced that the British had the potential to ultimately reject orthodox religion and recognise that 'women are entitled to a development as complete and unfettered as men'.<sup>205</sup> Although aware that this would not happen in the immediate future, Schreiner believed that England was beginning to head in the right direction. This thinking was bolstered by the writings of Mill and Spencer, and by the existence of progressive societies such as the Fabian Society and the Men and Women's Club. As a result, Schreiner journeyed to Britain confident that she was entering her own personal utopia and that the country and its peoples would provide the perfect antidote to the doctrinal narrowness and rigid inequities of her upbringing. Not only was she certain that she was going to meet many like-minded individuals, who shared her opinions and feminist vision of the future, but also that she would benefit from the numerous social and educational freedoms that her temporary home had to offer.

However, before contemplating Schreiner's sojourn in Britain, I first consider the extent to which her attitude towards the more progressive Dutch South Africans, and towards interracial relationships between the British and the Boers, had changed. Of the former, by the 1890s, Schreiner was praising the intellectual virility of the 'descendants of the African Boer' and observing that their seventeenth-century ideals, customs and pastoral lifestyles were key to their 'filling our schools', winning prizes and ranking

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<sup>205</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 2 November 1884, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 6-7.

high on the ‘yearly university lists of successful candidates’.<sup>206</sup> Although expanding on this in Chapter Four, it is worth noting that in comparison to Annie and Sannie, who can barely string a sentence together and struggle to make sense of long English words, the descendants of the Boers in *Thoughts* are lawgivers, magistrates, barristers and doctors. Of the former, by the time she wrote *Thoughts* and *An English-South African’s View*, Schreiner was convinced that the social, cultural and sexual intermingling of the Dutch and the British was vital to the formation of the South African nation of the future and was one of her main arguments against the South African War. Rather than causing a marked deterioration in the superiority of the British, as it had in *Undine*, Schreiner asserts in *Thoughts* that the blending of the two races would result in the remarkable intelligence of their offspring. Echoing Darwin’s suppositions that if allied varieties are crossed, there will be no retrogression, Schreiner illustrates how far her thinking had come by no longer regarding the Boer as inferior and by treating him as the equal of his fellow Europeans. Whilst I enlarge upon this in Chapter Four, there is clearly no evidence of this line of thinking in *Undine* or *African Farm*. Thus, in the next section, I inspect ‘what on earth happened’ to shift her allegiance away from the ‘best people on earth’ and caused such a startling transformation in her views on race.

#### From South Africa to Britain: The Origins of Schreiner’s Changing Allegiances

In this section, I assess the outcome of her sojourn in Britain and build upon the arguments put forward by Schoeman, Burdett and Stanley, which purport to explicate the reason behind Schreiner’s changing racial views. Whereas Schoeman attributes this change to the Boers becoming ‘romanticised by the homesickness she had experienced while abroad’, Burdett analyses Schreiner’s involvement with the Men and Women’s Club and particularly her associations with its founder, Karl Pearson.<sup>207</sup> Despite lasting a mere eighteen months, their friendship had an enormous impact upon Schreiner and, according to Burdett, much of her later thinking originated from their heated discussions during the 1880s and was written in opposition to his proto-eugenic stance on the Woman Question and to the Club’s elitist, social Darwinist beliefs. As Judith R. Walkowitz notes in her article, ‘Science, Feminism and Romance’ (1986), Pearson had

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<sup>206</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 194.

<sup>207</sup> Karel Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here: Olive Schreiner and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1992), p. 40.

decreed that its deliberations must be approached from a 'scientific standpoint' and had insisted that 'Darwinism, a[n] [...] ideology [...] which forever handicapped women [and 'inferior' races] [...] was the official language of the Club'.<sup>208</sup> With debate continuing to rage over their relationship- many critics claim that she was in love with him- I consider its significance and the effects that it had on her growing disillusionment with the British and on her adherence to the tenets of social Darwinism. Similarly, whilst agreeing that she was homesick- her letters are interspersed with references to her homeland- and that there is much to support Stanley's assertion that Schreiner experienced an intellectual watershed after her return to South Africa, I am of the opinion that the alteration in her thinking was far more complicated than these writers allow. As I demonstrate, I believe that there were manifold personal and private reasons for this shift and that it was not merely the result of homesickness or her passion for Pearson. Indeed, not only did she struggle with the consequences of her fame- as she complained to Ellis in 1889, 'I hate being a celebrity. Why won't the people leave me alone?'- but she was also devastated by her failure to attain to an egalitarian 'from man to man' friendship, free from gossip or 'sex-love'.<sup>209</sup> As she wryly commented in a letter to Edward Carpenter, with whom she got closest to achieving this fraternal comradeship, 'I wish I was a man that I might be [proper] friends with all of you, but you know my sex must always divide. I only feel like a man, but to you all I seem a woman!'<sup>210</sup> As I show, this divide became particularly apparent during her associations with the Club, which were tainted by personal tensions and gossip, and in her friendships with Pearson and Ellis.

Looking firstly at the former, the Men and Women's Club had been founded with the intention of discussing 'all matters [...] connected with the mutual position and relation of men and women'.<sup>211</sup> As a result, it covered a wide range of topics, during its four-year life-span, including sex relations in Periclean Athens, the position of Buddhist nuns, and the more contemporary issues of contraception, female education and prostitution.<sup>212</sup> Using novels, history, evolutionary theory, anthropology, Darwinism and biography to support these discussions, and to assess the ways in which

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<sup>208</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Science, Feminism and Romance: The Men and Women's Club 1885-1889' (1986), *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 21, p. 44.

<sup>209</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 17 February 1889, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 5-6.

<sup>210</sup> Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 12 April 1887, Sheffield Libraries, Archives & Information, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 34-37.

<sup>211</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> Bland, p. 4.

the relation of men and women had changed, its members were not only remarkable for their aims and ambitions, but also for their disregard for existing gender norms. Indeed, having stipulated in its constitution that an identical number of men and women should be involved in its discussions, the Club permitted the sexes to meet and interact on equal terms and challenge the widespread ignorance and mysticism surrounding the female body, sexual behaviour, instinct and desire. As Lucy Bland points out in *Banishing the Beast* (2001), 'In late Victorian England [...] sexuality was seen [...] as 'base' and 'animal'' and women were considered too chaste to take part in conversations about or take pleasure in sexual intimacy.<sup>213</sup> Keen to dispute such assumptions- Schreiner was vocal in her belief that women experienced sexual passion with the same intensity as men- and immerse herself in the Club's concerns and objectives, she readily accepted Elisabeth Cobb's invitation to join the group. Cobb, the wife of solicitor and Liberal M.P., Henry Cobb, assisted Pearson in sounding out and finding suitable female members for the Club. Carefully vetting those who were invited to join them on their 'intellectual adventure', several potential candidates were turned down on the basis of their faith- Dr Elizabeth Blackwell's job as a Christian physiologist was seen as 'prostituting the name of science'- or on the grounds of their being too conventional or too unrefined.<sup>214</sup> Although Schreiner was a freethinker and openly critical of women's economic dependency on men, Cobb viewed her novel as 'not quite wholesome'- she felt that Lyndall's death sent out the wrong message- and felt that her excitability and unreliability were a potential threat to the Club's earnestness of purpose.<sup>215</sup> Yet, in spite of her reservations, and Pearson's fears that Schreiner 'would take honey wherever she could find it', neither of them could deny the success of *African Farm* or dispute the pull of her celebrity status. As Walkowitz identifies in *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992), Schreiner 'was the toast of London: *African Farm* was second only to Mill's *Subjection of Women* in communicating the wrongs of womanhood to late-Victorians, particularly the thwarting of female individuality'.<sup>216</sup> Having long desired an outlet for her feminist proclivities, Schreiner was overjoyed at the thought of breaking down the 'wall of separation between the two

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<sup>213</sup> Bland, p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> Bland, p. 5.

<sup>215</sup> See First and Scott, pp. 148-149.

<sup>216</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 139.

halves of the human race'.<sup>217</sup> Not only was she optimistic that the Club would draw the sexes together and help them understand each other better, but she also hoped that it would strengthen relations between its female members and stop them feeling as if they were 'shut up to generalising from [their] own single experience[s]'.<sup>218</sup> Conscious that the men did not feel that these 'experiences' were representative of those of women in general, Schreiner observed in a letter to Cobb, 'that a thing quite as necessary as that women & men should understand & know more of each other is that women should know really & understand more of one another'.<sup>219</sup> Regardless of her attempts to get to know and understand her fellow female members better and prove to men, like Pearson, that their individual thoughts and feelings were indicative of those of other women, Schreiner was baffled by their lack of feminine solidarity and by their reluctance to support one another. Whilst contributing to Schreiner's ongoing ambivalence towards women- her letters frequently refer to their meanness, wickedness and pettiness- and to her growing discontent with the British as a race, she was even more discouraged by the Club's inability to draw the sexes together. Indeed, rather than successfully 'breaking down the wall of separation' between them, the Club was dominated by animosities, grievances, gossip and romantic intrigues, and the 'two halves of the human race' ultimately failed to engage in free and equal conversation and study.

I believe this was due to the fact that, whilst they saw themselves as part of an intellectual and political vanguard, uninhibited by traditional middle-class institutions and values, they were incapable of entirely moving away from and dispensing with conventional attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Despite formal equality being written into the Club's constitution, neither sex was able, as Cobb confessed in a letter to Pearson, to "shake off the feeling [that] men [were] the leaders of women".<sup>220</sup> As a consequence, the male members, who were Oxbridge educated and enjoyed public roles as lawyers, doctors and university lecturers, set the Club's agenda and dominated its discussions. The women, on the other hand, used to being identified with the chaste and passionless Angel in the House, deferred to the men and struggled to find their voice. Although delighted at both their inclusion in these discussions and at the prospect of

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<sup>217</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Elisabeth Cobb nee Sharpe, 21 December 1884, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 36-37.

<sup>218</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Elisabeth Cobb nee Sharpe, 12 February 1885, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 18-19.

<sup>219</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Elisabeth Cobb nee Sharpe, 12 February 1885, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 16-18.

<sup>220</sup> Quoted in First and Scott, p. 148.



moving beyond the confines of their family circles, homes and churches, the women were undoubtedly wary of being connected to discussions of an intimate and sexual nature and anxious about the effect that their affiliations with the Club would have on their reputations. As she acknowledged in a letter to Pearson, Schreiner was aware that they were being referred to as 'old maids and man-haters'. She was also concerned that as a well-known 'young unmarried woman', rather than a married woman in an 'established position', she was 'liable to be hurt by the things that [were] said'.<sup>221</sup> Subsequently, both the unmarried and married female members- who, despite their 'established positions', were cognisant of the effect that their associations with the Club could have on their marriages- strove to do all they could to avoid public ridicule and keep their characters intact.

Indeed, aside from Schreiner, many of the women were opposed to naming the Club after eighteenth-century feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, who had become embroiled in several unsanctioned love affairs and had borne two illegitimate children, fearing that it would, in the words of Walkowitz, 'personally embarrass them and call into question their own respectability'.<sup>222</sup> In addition, they raised objections to Pearson's plan to recruit Schreiner's close friend Eleanor Marx-Aveling, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx, to the Club. As Club secretary, Maria Sharpe pointed out in an 1886 letter to Pearson, their objections centred on Marx's common-law marriage to Edward Aveling, who had separated from but remained legally wedded to his first wife, and her apparent endorsement of 'free love'. The free love movement, which began in the 1820s, sought to challenge the state's interference in and dominion over sexual matters, particularly marriage. Not only were its advocates perturbed by an institution that compelled women to be economically dependent on their husbands and surrender their bodies to his every whim, but they also believed that women should be able to enter into monogamous relationships without forfeiting their legal, sexual and political autonomy.<sup>223</sup> However, as Sharpe's letter to Pearson demonstrates, the majority of the Club were inherently suspicious of free love, which was often confused with sexual promiscuity and polygamy, and its implications for women. Whilst placing them on an equal footing with men and giving them the freedom to pursue their own happiness, it also left them economically vulnerable, responsible for any child in their care, liable to

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<sup>221</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 11 October 1885, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 14-20.

<sup>222</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 140.

<sup>223</sup> Bland, pp. 156-158.

be cast aside once the man had tired of their union, and in danger of permanently damaging their reputations. As Bland remarks, a woman ‘labelled a ‘free lover’ was likely to be slandered not simply as a ‘sinner’ living with a man outside wedlock, but also as a ‘promiscuous woman’, sexually available to all men’.<sup>224</sup> Regardless of her fellow Club members seeing her as sexually adventurous and worldly- Cobb professed to Pearson that Schreiner had ““much more varied experience of men than most women, I doubt if she believes in marriage at all””- she did not subscribe to or practise free love or agree with extramarital, non-marital or temporary unions.<sup>225</sup> Despite believing that it was ‘right’ and ‘important’ to terminate a marriage the moment a husband or wife felt that ‘they did not love each other or loved anyone else better’, Schreiner was distressed to learn, as she confessed in a letter to South African minister John T. Lloyd, that people supposed that she was against ‘life-long’ and ‘deathless’ unions. She states, ‘One thing I always find it difficult to understand is how people gather from any of my writings that I think lightly of marriage. I think it to be the most holy, [...] organic, [...] [and] important sacrament in life’.<sup>226</sup> Conscious that most of her fellow members felt even more strongly about marriage and non-marital unions than she did and would disapprove of Marx-Aveling’s situation, Schreiner disagreed with Pearson’s decision to invite her to join the Club. In spite of her friendship with Marx-Aveling, she disclosed in a March 1886 letter to Sharpe:

I had heard from Dr D[onkin] that Mr Pearson had asked him to ask Eleanor to join the club. I should have written to remonstrate with K.P. on the matter, but knew she would decline [...] I am sure that all of us [...] would be proud to have her [...] but while personally looking up to & admiring her for her fearless conduct [...] I should not have felt at all sure that some man or woman might not have felt that they suffered in being connected with one whom the outside world holds to have broken the most important of its conventional rules.<sup>227</sup>

Whereas Pearson himself regarded the Avelings’ partnership as the form that marriage should take- as he informed Sharpe in July 1885, ““To me the noblest union must be a free contract””- Schreiner’s letter demonstrates how unwilling the more conventional

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<sup>224</sup> Bland, p. 158.

<sup>225</sup> Quoted in First and Scott, p. 148.

<sup>226</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to John T. Lloyd, 1892, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 26-29.

<sup>227</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Maria Sharpe m. Pearson (1890), 23 March 1886, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription, lines 9-19.

members were to be associated with sexual radicalism and how constrained they were by the edicts of the 'outside world'.<sup>228</sup> As a result, the Club agreed that, given the dangers that free love posed to women, reformed legal marriage was infinitely preferable to non-marital unions. Although, its members were in general agreement about the need for marital reforms and the perils of free love and free unions, the fact that they possessed such a variety of outlooks hinted at deep tensions and divides within the Club itself. As I illustrate, these divides caused ructions during meetings and haunted the correspondence and relationships between members outside of the Club. Notably, these problems were exacerbated by the teachings of British aural surgeon and author James Hinton and debates concerning prostitution and the Club's social Darwinist position.

Hinton was most well-known within the Club for writing the controversial *Law-Breaker* (1884), which proposed creating a new society based on the law of service to others and was posthumously edited and published by Ellis. To illustrate how man might create such a society and fulfil this notion of service to others, Hinton drew convoluted parallels between Christ's attitudes towards law-breaking and nineteenth-century marriage and morality. Professing that He himself had broken one of the laws governing the Sabbath and had 'blasphemed God' in order to service the needs of others, Hinton contends that Christ had felt that such laws 'were made for man, but that man was not made for such laws'. Believing that Christ would take a similar approach to nineteenth-century marriage and monogamy, Hinton not only insinuates that the laws surrounding both institutions were 'strictly ceremonial [...] [and] not moral in any other sense', but also that He was keen to deliver man from the false theologies and superstitions that dominated passion, lust, service and virtue.<sup>229</sup> Of these theologies and superstitions, Hinton notes that Christ said: 'You make void the law of God through your traditions; with your ideas of goodness and serving God, you make His commands of no effect'.<sup>230</sup> In addition, Hinton comes to the realisation that the Jews and Greeks had interpreted these commands incorrectly, had put unnecessary restraints upon themselves and had neglected Christ's one true law, which was to love and serve one another. Thus, in order for men and women to comply with this 'command' fully, they had to disregard what they considered morally good, consent to pleasure- Hinton hoped

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<sup>228</sup> Quoted in Bland, p. 173.

<sup>229</sup> James Hinton, *The Law-Breaker and The Coming of the Law* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884), p. 4.

<sup>230</sup> Hinton, p. 64.

in the future that there would no grounds for avoiding bodily relations- and lay aside any laws and restraints that impinged on serving the needs of others. He writes:

We cannot put serving God instead of serving man as a means of keeping pleasure from being pursued. The service of man may make pleasure perfectly free, even sought for and incumbent; but it will not be ruling. But the service of God, while it makes pleasure not free, still leaves it ruling. This is our choice: pleasure ruling but not free; or pleasure free and not ruling.<sup>231</sup>

With its emphasis on serving the needs of man, instead of serving God, and making pleasure free from legal and moral obstacles, Hinton's detractors denounced *The Lawbreaker* as blasphemous and debauched. Whilst Schreiner, who had first encountered Hinton via Jane Ellice Hopkins's *Life and Letters* (1878), had been impressed with his views, which initially seemed to 'chime in' with her own thoughts and feelings, she grew increasingly sceptical of his questionable sexual ethics. As she exclaimed in an 1886 letter to Ellis, 'What a terrible deadly thing [...] Hinton theory is, like a upas tree blighting all it comes in contact with because it is false to human nature'.<sup>232</sup> Within the Men and Women's Club, the 'falseness' of 'Hinton theory' blighted its discussions and triggered arguments about the desirability of asking Hintonians to join the group. This was due to the fact, as First and Scott point out, that Hinton had 'apparently been completely 'unhinged' by his discovery of female sexuality at the end of his life and his circle gained a reputation for licentiousness and polygamy that appalled radicals just as much as conservatives'.<sup>233</sup> Therefore, when Schreiner suggested that Hinton's sister-in-law Caroline Haddon should be invited to attend meetings, the more conservative Sharpe raised concerns about her 'polygamous' living situation and requested that Pearson investigate. Whilst Pearson had originally reacted with enthusiasm to Hintonism, he had quickly come to loathe both the man and his theories and had been alarmed to discover, over the course of his two-month investigation, that Haddon had not only lived with her brother-in-law, but had also been sexually intimate with him. As Schreiner told Pearson in December 1885, Hinton had sat a naked Miss Haddon on his knee and had 'play[ed] with her: his theory was that a

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<sup>231</sup> Hinton, p. 124.

<sup>232</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 18 October 1886, National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 1-4.

<sup>233</sup> First and Scott, p. 128.

man's wish for contact with a woman's body was right, & must be gratified'.<sup>234</sup> In addition, novelist Emma Brooke had divulged to Pearson that, while staying with Hinton and his followers, he had tried to persuade her that it was "her duty and her glory" to give herself up to him and service his needs. In spite of Haddon's attempts to refute and downplay allegations that Hinton had seduced young girls and had 'helped himself liberally to such favours as he could get by the way', an influx of similar stories led to the Club's growing enmity towards Hintonism and ended discussions about asking her to attend meetings.<sup>235</sup> Notably, their antagonism was reinforced by the behaviour of Hinton's son, Charles Howard Hinton, who had confessed to and was charged with bigamy. As I affirm later, Hintonism and its emphasis on serving others created difficulties between Schreiner and Ellis, and his son's trial- and the gossip surrounding it- caused a rift between herself, Cobb and Pearson and ultimately led to her departure to Europe. However, before exploring this in more detail, I return to the issues creating divides within the Club.

Importantly the beginning of the Club coincided with a series of sensationalist articles on juvenile sexual exploitation, written by journalist W. T. Stead. Entitled the 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', the four articles, published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in July 1885, compared an ancient Greek myth- in which seven youths and maidens found themselves forced into the Labyrinth of Daedalus and sacrificed to the Minotaur- with the enforced sexual slavery of young virgins in underground brothels in London and abroad. Determined to rouse the nation into supporting the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which sought to raise the age of sexual consent from thirteen to sixteen, and strengthen the existing legislation against prostitution, Stead mounted a six-week investigation into the secret, labyrinthine world of the 'London Minotaur'. As he professes in the first of his articles, 'Within that labyrinth wander[ed] [...] the vast host of London prostitutes, whose numbers [...] are probably not much below 50,000 strong [...] and none that go into the secret recesses of his lair return again'.<sup>236</sup> Interviewing prostitutes, brothel-keepers, procuresses and other 'experts', he discovered that 'daughters of the poor' were lured to the East End under false pretences- they, and their

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<sup>234</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 21 December 1885, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 9-10.

<sup>235</sup> Quoted in First and Scott, p. 152.

<sup>236</sup> William T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I: the Report of our Secret Commission', *The Pall Mall Gazette* (6 July 1885).

parents, were tempted by the promise of clothes and money- and sold to the ‘dissolute rich’, who ‘revelled’ in trapping, drugging, raping and torturing them.

To demonstrate the ease with which these men could buy these girls, and sell them on to the ‘pleasure palaces on the Continent’, Stead set about procuring thirteen-year-old Eliza Armstrong from her parents. Securing her services for the paltry sum of five pounds, Stead, whilst ensuring that Eliza remained unharmed, put her through the motions of a real juvenile prostitute, including having her virginity verified by an abortionist and having her taken to a brothel on Regent Street, where she was undressed, put to bed and drugged with chloroform. Recounting these events in the conclusion to his first article- ‘A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5’- Stead altered Eliza’s name to ‘Lily’ and concealed his identity as the ‘purchaser’ who had burst into her bedroom, locked the door and scared her so much that she had begged to go home. Mrs Armstrong, having seen through this ruse, contacted the police, insisting that she had been duped into thinking that Eliza was going into domestic service. Unable to prove her complicity in this transaction, Stead was charged with abduction and indecent assault, and spent several months in prison. Both Stead’s articles and imprisonment caused an uproar. Within days of their publication, newspaper vendors were clamouring for reprints and, in the words of Stead, ‘All England [was] ringing with the echoes of our exposure [...] [T]here [was] not a capital on the Continent in which public journals are not reproducing [...] the[se] frightful revelations’.<sup>237</sup> Despite this apparent show of support, and the fact that his revelations had resulted in the passage of the Bill, Stead’s success was tempered by his outraged detractors. Accusing him of ‘flooding London with filth and obscenity’, he admitted in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (13 July 1885) that several readers- including the Prince of Wales- had cancelled their subscriptions and many of his distributors had been arrested.

Within the Men and Women’s Club, the sexes remained divided by his articles and by the issues raised in them. Whilst the female members struggled to contain their horror, and were desperate to prove their allegiance to Stead- Schreiner composed a letter of thanks for the other women to sign- Pearson and Club president Robert Parker expressed concern at the anxiety and fanaticism aroused by his revelations. Their concern appeared justified by Schreiner’s letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In it, she revealed the depth of her and the Club’s gratitude to Stead and evidently saw this as a

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<sup>237</sup> William T. Stead, ‘To Our Censors’, *The Pall Mall Gazette* (13 July 1885).

way of having her opinions on sexual coercion and exploitation articulated in the press. She exclaims:

To some of us your words have come as a revelation. They have shown us what lay behind our smooth lives: they have filled us with remorse. Have we not too been guilty? Have we not made it easy for man to smite down with the right hand, while he honours us with the left? Have we cried out, 'All women are one. In the saddest girl-child that is wrong I too suffer?' *Have we been content to be ignorant?*<sup>238</sup>

Given its allusions to women's complicity in and identification with child prostitution, not only did the men, and some of the women, consider it 'too emotional' and 'too sensational'- it was quickly replaced by a more formal note from suffragist Millicent Fawcett- but Pearson and Parker were also displeased by Schreiner's preoccupation with male accountability. Whilst glad that Stead had uncovered the 'extent of the evil', Pearson was afraid, as he confided to Sharpe, that women would 'not recognize that the majority of men are as guiltless as the women of these atrocities'.<sup>239</sup> However, his worries were nothing compared to the dissatisfaction felt by the women, who had joined the Club on the proviso that Stead's articles would pave the way for transforming relations between the sexes and altering attitudes towards the sexual double standard. Unsurprisingly, these transformations did not occur, and when Henrietta Müller, the only university educated female member, suggested, in her paper 'The Other Side of the Question', that men were slaves to their sexual instinct and were singlehandedly responsible for the outrages produced by prostitution, she was upset by the Club's negative response. Like Schreiner, Müller was criticised for being too emotional, and for intimating that men lacked self-control and were morally inferior. Shocked, too, at Müller's inference that women were the moral saviours of the race, Sharpe disdainfully proclaimed that she had not written her paper in the "spirit of scientific inquiry so much as in the spirit of a rebel".<sup>240</sup> Whereas Müller eventually left the Club determined to start a rival group, which would treat its members equally, Schreiner was keen to show her fellow members that she could approach prostitution from a purely Darwinian standpoint. Dominating her life and writing for 'ten years', and working

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<sup>238</sup> Letter from Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter (12 July 1885), quoted in First and Scott, p. 156. Her italics.

<sup>239</sup> Quoted in Bland, p. 8.

<sup>240</sup> Quoted in Bland, p. 14.

with lower and 'wealthy' class prostitutes 'practically at first hand', Schreiner identifies the extent to which Pearson and the Club influenced her thinking, and moulded the issues that were to shape her later treatise on slavery and the sexual exploitation of black South Africans.<sup>241</sup> However, her involvement with these prostitutes also established how difficult she found it to draw a line of demarcation between her work and her duty to help others. As the letters of other female members reveal, Schreiner was not the only one to struggle with the Club's insistence on approaching investigations from a scientific standpoint and divesting themselves of their feminine subjectivity.

Already grappling with feelings of intellectual inadequacy- the women were mainly teachers, writers and journalists- they were disappointed to learn that they would have to acquaint themselves, according to Sharpe, with a "partially new language before they could make themselves intelligible".<sup>242</sup> Unable, for the most part, to speak objectively and apply this 'new language' to the emotions engendered by the club's discussions on motherhood, morality and sexuality, the women struggled to find their voices and were often reduced to silence. As Müller complained in her resignation letter- a copy of which she had sent to Schreiner- 'I have decided that [it] is a piteous failure. The men lay down the law, the women resent in silence and submit in silence'.<sup>243</sup> In Pearson's inaugural paper, 'The Woman's Question' (1885), he makes it clear that he wanted to 'lay down the law' with regards to woman's role and duties and query the effect that her emancipation, access to education, the professions and the vote would have on society, and on the future of the race. Convinced that female emancipation would revolutionise all existing institutions, Pearson decrees that, whilst there may be benefits, such as the cessation of prostitution and a freer form of marriage, there is no evidence to suggest that it will increase the stability or happiness of humankind. Using the higher education of women as an example of this, he states that although it 'may connote a general intellectual progress for the community'; it may also cause the 'physical degradation of the race, owing to prolonged study having ill effects on woman's child-bearing efficiency'.<sup>244</sup> Despite commending women for their recent

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<sup>241</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, 21 April 1912, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 21-25.

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Bland, p. 25.

<sup>243</sup> Letter attached to 'Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 6 April 1888, Sheffield Libraries, Archives & Information, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription'.

<sup>244</sup> Karl Pearson, *The Ethic of Freethought and other Addresses and Essays* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), p. 355.



college and university successes, he maintains that there must be a valid historical reason for their subjection and for their exclusion from politics and public affairs. He claims that this reason revolves around their capacity and potentiality for childbearing. Returning to this hypothesis repeatedly, he argues that, whatever the evils of woman's current position, her first duty must be to the nation. Reminding his listeners that the 'nations which have been most reproductive have [...] been the ruling nations in the world's history', Pearson infers that women should sacrifice their own freedom and individual rights in order to aid England's survival 'in the battle for life' and preserve its race-predominance.<sup>245</sup> Clearly employing Darwinism to justify woman's subordination, he writes, 'If child-bearing women must be intellectually handicapped, then the penalty to be paid for race-predominance is the subjection of women'.<sup>246</sup> However, as he takes pains to point out, Britain will only retain its ethnic supremacy if it confines reproduction to the eugenically 'fit', and does not allow the diseased, idle or reckless to become the parents of future generations. Feeling that the perpetuation of such inferior characteristics was a great crime against the race, Pearson averred that the state should intervene and ensure that only the 'fittest' women had children.

Yet, not only did many of the female members find Pearson's assumptions offensive and patronising, but they also had an electrifying effect on Schreiner. Determined, as we have seen, to carry out his exhortation to recognise the facts and 'innumerable difficulties' of prostitution, and express an educated opinion on it in the Press, his paper encouraged Schreiner to focus on public matters and was the focal point of their early letters.<sup>247</sup> Before considering the nature of these letters, which began shortly before the Club's first meeting in July 1885 and which Burdett treats as 'love letters', it is important to note that they highlight her struggles within the Club, and the fall-outs they engendered.<sup>248</sup> More significantly, they draw attention to what I believe is a key feature of her letters to Pearson, her unsuccessful attempts to forge, in the words of Helen Dampier, a 'from man to man' relationship with him, in which 'public, political and intellectual concerns were paramount'.<sup>249</sup> These attempts took several

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<sup>245</sup> Pearson, p. 373.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Pearson, p. 364.

<sup>248</sup> Burdett's opinion is shared by a multitude of other critics, such as Walkowitz and Ruth Brandon, due, in part, to the fact that they rely heavily on a limited collection of her letters. This has since been redressed by Helen Dampier and the Olive Schreiner Letters Project, who have published her letters in full.

<sup>249</sup> Helen Dampier, 'Re-readings of Olive Schreiner's Letters to Karl Pearson: against closure' in Liz Stanley (ed.), "'Olive Schreiner and Company: Letters and 'Drinking in the External World'", OSLP

forms. In common with her later letters to politicians in South Africa, including her brother Will, Schreiner used her correspondence to disagree with Pearson and persuade him to take a different approach to Darwinist views on the sexes and on sex-difference.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, of his aforementioned paper, she alleges that he had omitted ‘one whole [and very important] field’. She notes:

The omission was ‘Man’. Your whole paper reads as though the object of the club were to dis-cuss (sic) woman, her objects, her needs, her mental & physical nature, & man only in as far as he throws light upon her question. This is entirely wrong.<sup>251</sup>

In addition, Schreiner sent him a note, which, in the event of the paper being published, could be attached to the end of it, detailing this omission. Criticising his ‘writing freely’, she informed Pearson on several occasions that she was disappointed by his tendency to mould truth and reason to fit his conclusions, that his articles were unworthy of him and his meaning could easily be misunderstood. Although it is impossible to know what Pearson made of her remarks- none of his letters to her are extant- Schreiner not only offered frank advice about his work, but also suggested members and topics for the Club and writers that he might enjoy, such as Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Similarly, she endeavoured to find a means of aiding him to achieve his ‘full height’ and uncover the conditions that helped him to produce his best work. Evidently regarding him as her ‘intellectual reference-point’, she frequently sought his opinions on her manuscripts and sex-book, which she hoped they could write together, and debated sexual and political topics with him as his equal. These topics included prostitution, intercourse during pregnancy, paternal instinct and the role the senses played in sexual pleasure. Her interest in these topics, and criticisms of Pearson, are also notable for the fact that they show Schreiner’s struggle to live up to her role as a disinterested researcher- particularly in relation to her work with prostitutes- and her growing awareness of the connection between sexual and racial equality. Recalling that ‘Kaffirs’ have a specific name for the sex-organs of unmarried women- which translates as “your-father’s-oxen” or “her-father’s-oxen”- she notes that, if ‘hundreds of years were to pass & the whole social condition to change, one would have the history of the

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*Working Papers on Letters, Letterness & Epistolary Networks*, No. 3., University of Edinburgh (2011), p. 51.

<sup>250</sup> Dampier, p. 54.

<sup>251</sup> Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 10 July 1885, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 7-10.

present all summed up in that word'.<sup>252</sup> As this letter intimates, Schreiner was becoming increasingly conscious of the unenviable position of all women- they were all the property of and ruled by men- and of the 'great fund of wisdom' that could 'be found' from studying her fellow South Africans. Additionally, as she tells Pearson, the 'Kaffirs' placed considerable emphasis on the paternal instinct, an issue that Schreiner was passionate about. Indeed, after the birth of a baby, the father usually took possession of it. In her letters to Pearson, she similarly accentuates her hopes that their correspondence could act as the forerunner of a new type of union between the sexes, which remained untouched by sex-love. The importance that she placed on their intellectual conversations is apparent in a letter she had written in the aftermath of the breakdown of their relationship. She states:

The life of a woman like myself is a very solitary one. You have had a succession of friendships that have answered to the successive stages of your mental [growth] [...] Intellectual friendship was a thing I had only dreamed of. Our brief intellectual relations & our few conversations have been commonplace enough to you, to me they have been absolutely unique. I have known nothing like it in my life.<sup>253</sup>

Despite Schreiner's strenuous denials that she had sexual feelings for Pearson, much has been made of her concerns about his health, her anguish at the idea of him getting married, her fears about offending him and her volunteering herself as a scientific specimen. Notably, several members of the Club were similarly convinced that she was in love with him, including Ellis, Cobb and Donkin, who was in love with Schreiner and had proposed to her several times. Aware that Cobb and Donkin had imparted their suspicions to Pearson, Schreiner's correspondence makes it evident that she held them responsible for the breakdown of her friendship with him. Not only had Donkin told Pearson that she was 'smashed' by her feelings for him and asked him to stop writing to her, but also, in a letter to Ellis, Schreiner intimates that a 'brutally selfish' Cobb had purposely tried to 'injure anyone who she thought was his friend'.<sup>254</sup> Doing this by relaying private information that Schreiner had shared with her, such as

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<sup>252</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 19 September 1886, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 36-40.

<sup>253</sup> Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 30 January 1887, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 126-134.

<sup>254</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 2 February 1887, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 28-29.

her opinions on other women in the Club, and by endeavouring to interfere in conversations between her and Pearson, Cobb's behaviour stresses the gossip-mongering and petty jealousies that prevented 'man to man' comradeships from flourishing. Indeed, as Dampier notes in her article, 'Re-Readings of Olive Schreiner's Letters to Karl Pearson', Cobb's 'malicious gossiping' likewise centred on and affected Schreiner's friendship with the 'Hintonian' Ellis. In addition, both Donkin and Ellis were threatened by her relationship with Pearson. Desperate to reassure Ellis on this point, Schreiner came to the conclusion that 'I oughtn't talk to you about Karl at all, but some-times I feel that it will always keep dividing us if you don't understand at all'.<sup>255</sup> It was this lack of understanding that made the type of friendship Schreiner had sought with these men impossible. Having come to Britain confident that relations between the sexes were growing increasingly equal, she was dismayed to learn that they were still hampered by the rigid gender roles that she had hoped to escape after leaving South Africa. She was also distressed by the fact that there were distinct parallels between the women she had encountered in London and the gossipy, narrow-minded inhabitants of Greenwood. Indeed, I believe that it was these issues, the problems marring discussions within the Club, and her correspondence with Pearson and Ellis, which I discuss shortly, that had led Schreiner to question her earlier assumption that the British were the 'best race on earth', and had contributed to her homesickness for South Africa and its peoples.

Schreiner's correspondence with Ellis had begun in February 1884, when he had written to her expressing his appreciation of *African Farm*. Deducing that it was her first novel, he critiqued her 'inclination' for 'moralising' and shared his hopes that her 'next novel [would] show the same vivid reality [but] with an added power of telling a well-got-up story'.<sup>256</sup> Grateful for his comments and delighted by his identification with her 'old life'- he had spent four years living and teaching in a 'similar environment' in New South Wales- her reply cemented a correspondence that would last until Schreiner's death in 1920. Despite bursting into tears of 'disappointment' upon first meeting him, they had a great deal in common, including a shared antagonism for organised religion and a mutual interest in socialism, medicine, the Woman

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<sup>255</sup> Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 2 February 1887, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 3-5.

<sup>256</sup> Letter from Havelock Ellis to Olive Schreiner (20 February 1884), quoted in Yaffa Claire Draznin (ed.), *My Other Self: The Letters of Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, 1884-1920* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 33.

Question and sexual matters. As Ellis affirms, 'We had found ourselves akin in all sorts of essential matters, with common interests and ideals in the social as well as the intellectual aspects of life'.<sup>257</sup> Given that a 'little over a month' after their 'first meeting' they were 'on terms of friendship so close' that they read each other's diaries and discussed intimate subjects such as masturbation, arousal, nocturnal emissions and incest, the significance of their relationship has been widely debated. Much of this debate revolves around whether their unorthodox behaviour- Ellis recalls her walking about naked in front of him and examining his sperm under a microscope- had led to the consummation of their relationship. Whilst biographer Vera Buchanan-Gould finds it improbable that their 'love' was strictly platonic, and Johannes Meintjes argues that they had a brief affair, during which they engaged in 'sex-play', the consensus seems to be that nothing much happened between them.<sup>258</sup> This is corroborated by *My Life*, in which Ellis divulges that, although the 'thought of marriage' had for 'one brief instant floated before [his] eyes', they had 'scarcely' progressed beyond the stage of friendship and 'were not what can be technically, or even ordinarily, called lovers'.<sup>259</sup> Yet, regardless of whether they were lovers, I believe that Schreiner tired of the demands that he placed on her, through his Hintonian desire to serve her. Whilst Stanley makes the point that Ellis's letters, in Draznin's *My Other Self*, are drafts and bear an unknown relationship to the ones that he actually sent to Schreiner, they do show that he had little time for her expositions on art, science and literature and her preoccupation with equality and the Woman Question. Preferring, according to Draznin, to 'deflect any exchange of [these] ideas in favour of epistolary talk of her subjective feelings', he actively encouraged her to depend on him in any way she saw fit and regularly acted as her physician, prescribing and recommending various treatments for her asthma.<sup>260</sup> As his letters exemplify, he felt happiest, and closest to Schreiner, when she was ill or unhappy. Although she was grateful for his devotion to her, his constant anxiety about her working too hard and determination to force her into playing a womanly and subservient role, had a suffocating effect on her. As she complains to Ellis, 'You ought

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<sup>257</sup> Havelock Ellis, *My Life: Autobiography of Havelock Ellis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), p. 229.

<sup>258</sup> See Vera Buchanan-Gould, *Not Without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1948), p. 83; Johannes Meintjes, *Olive Schreiner: Portrait of a South African Woman* (Johannesburg: Hugh Keartland, 1965), p. 73.

<sup>259</sup> Ellis, p. 230.

<sup>260</sup> Draznin, p. 8.

to want me to be happy, it's such a dreadful thing for my brain when I give way'.<sup>261</sup> What is notable about Ellis's keenness for Schreiner to play a certain role is that it represents the difficulties of applying certain nineteenth-century ideologies to relations between the sexes. It also accentuates the pressures that Schreiner had faced in several of her friendships- and as a result of her fame.

Not only did Donkin's proposals and protestations of love force her to twice seek refuge in convents, but she also struggled with the hero-worship of women who were attracted by her authorship of *African Farm*. As she admits to Pearson in February 1888, 'If I had stayed in London for two years more I should have broken down forever under intense pressure'.<sup>262</sup> As I have demonstrated in this chapter, this 'intense pressure' came from several sources, cannot be attributed to one particular relationship and all culminated in the homesickness that Schoeman has alluded to. I similarly believe that the same can be said for her growing disillusionment with social Darwinism, which I have traced from its roots in her childhood jingoism to her encomium of the Boers in *Thoughts*, and her shift in allegiance from the British to her fellow South Africans. Although Pearson undoubtedly helped to clarify her position on social Darwinism and encouraged her to turn her attention to the external world of action, her involvement with him, and the Men and Women's Club, were part of a lengthy process that was cemented on her return to South Africa. In the next chapter, I explore Schreiner's horror at the changes that had occurred in her absence, and her increasing preoccupation with the damage wrought on the country as a consequence of Britain's capitalist policies. Whereas Schreiner had returned to South Africa intending to write a series of articles on the relationship between the British and the Boers, these were soon abandoned due to her mounting concern over the gross sexual and racial exploitation of the blacks.

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<sup>261</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 24 March 1885, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 14-15.

<sup>262</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 5 February 1888, University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 54-55.

### Chapter Three:

#### From Briton to South African: Schreiner's Return to Her Homeland

##### Chapter Overview

In *Imperial Leather* (1995), Anne McClintock claims that 'one of [Schreiner's] central motivations to write: [was] the desire to rescue history, the flesh and language from oblivion'.<sup>263</sup> Although referring to her allegories, McClintock's statement, as I argue in this chapter, similarly applies to her later works, *The Political Situation* (1895), *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1896) and *Thoughts*. In these later texts, Schreiner rescues South Africa's colonial 'history' and language- and the history of other European colonies and countries- in order to raise awareness of historical events, make political points and authenticate particular lines of reasoning. In *The Political Situation*, for example, Schreiner employs history to support what she viewed as the necessary formation of a Progressive party in South Africa. Having becoming aware, on her return to her homeland in 1889, of the dangers of British capitalism and its exploitation of the country's mineral and human 'flesh' (Boer and Black), Schreiner hoped to drag the existing Progressive Element out of oblivion and encourage them to protest against and stay the growing racial inequalities. Horrified by the machinations of Cecil Rhodes, Schreiner tried to wake her 'oblivious' audience, the 'Great British Public', to the activities of his British South Africa Company, to his passing of retrogressive legislation during his time as Prime Minister, and to his monopoly over the country's mineral wealth.<sup>264</sup> Along with a band of European speculators, who were able to afford superior digging equipment and buy out the smaller interests, Rhodes 'quickly and surely [set] [his] hands round the mineral wealth of South Africa'.<sup>265</sup> Already disillusioned by the British, after her unsuccessful sojourn in Europe, I examine the retrogressive legislation, language and behaviour that severed her connection to, and forced her to turn her back on, her self-professed motherland and her staunchly pro-Rhodes family. As Schreiner noted in an 1895 letter to Edward Carpenter, 'It's really too bad that you English should send out your bloated millionaires to eat us up

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<sup>263</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 280.

<sup>264</sup> The Chartered British South Africa Company had been authorised to annex territory, raise and maintain a standing army and make war.

<sup>265</sup> Olive Schreiner, *The Political Situation* (1895) (Montana: Kessinger, 2010), p. 9.

[financially, socially and politically]. And the English people backing them & calling it “extending the empire””.<sup>266</sup> Deeply preoccupied by the racial inequities caused by these ‘millionaires’ and by their retrograde attempts at ‘extending the empire’, I consider Schreiner’s use of what she described as centuries of white masterhood and black submission.

Tracing her colonial relationship with and reactions to this history, I turn my attention to Schreiner’s depiction of the ‘native races’. Whilst, in Chapter Two, I explored the shift in Schreiner’s attitude towards the Boers, I use this chapter to investigate her changing outlook towards the ‘natives’ and her attempts to equalise conditions between them and South Africa’s white races. In doing so, I challenge claims that she was a racist and that her political writing acted, according to First and Scott, as an ‘apologia for the [unequal white] treatment of the African peoples’.<sup>267</sup> In addition, I look at the ‘increase’ in ‘knowledge’ that had contributed to Schreiner’s changing feelings towards the blacks and had led to her devoting the rest of her life to abetting them against the whites. Indeed, her ‘increase’ in ‘knowledge’ and growing devotion to her fellow South Africans had stemmed from her interest in and outrage against the incidents that she felt had shaped and were still shaping an unequal future in South Africa. By focusing on these incidents and by ‘rescuing’ the country’s unequal racial past, present and future- particularly in relation to the ‘natives’- Schreiner not only shows how far her thinking on equality had come, but also how integral equality was to her later life and work. Although her main concern during the 1890s was race, her later writing also highlights the connections she was making between black South Africans and white women, and between sexual and racial exploitation.

### Schreiner and South Africa’s Key Historical Events in Context

Whilst Schreiner’s fiction may have neglected, in the words of McClintock, South Africa’s ‘very real history of colonial plunder’, dispossession and rout- and the privileged position it in turn afforded her- her political writing undeniably ‘rescues’ and addresses it in full.<sup>268</sup> Before becoming absorbed in the events that precipitated the writing of *Trooper Peter* and *The Political Situation*, Schreiner had begun to consider

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<sup>266</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 31 August 1895, Sheffield Libraries, Archives & Information, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 10-12.

<sup>267</sup> Ruth First and Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 197.

<sup>268</sup> McClintock, p. 266.



her present relationship to and past antagonism towards her homeland and its peoples in *Thoughts*. Intimating that her years away from South Africa had given her a unique, ‘somewhat two-fold position’, Schreiner maintains that she had returned with the emotional detachment and objectivity necessary to come to a ‘true understanding’ of the land, [...] history, [...] physical features and [...] problems.<sup>269</sup> Defining her ‘position’ as ‘half-outsider’ and ‘half-lover’, she notes that ‘no man understands a thing till he has coldly criticised it [...] [and] no man knows a thing till he has loved it’.<sup>270</sup> Whilst this position certainly applies to the Boers, whom she had ‘coldly criticised’ in *African Farm* and whose ‘antique faults and heroic virtues’ Schreiner had later come to love, it also applies to the blacks and to the country as a whole. As she acknowledges in the Preface to *Thoughts*, ‘When at the end of those ten years I came back to my native land [...] the wish became stronger to jot down what I thought and felt with regard to it’.<sup>271</sup> Charting her own colonial and racial history, she makes clear that before her trip to Europe, her position towards the British and her fellow South Africans was ‘lover’ and ‘outsider’ respectively. Although she lived outside of Britain, she considered herself English, and had immersed herself in English culture, ideas and beliefs. Similarly, although she was born and raised in South Africa and had lived on Boer farms, she felt separate from and superior to the lifestyles, customs and experiences of her black and white neighbours. As Schreiner confirms, she had viewed her fellow South Africans with the ‘contempt’ of the ‘stranger’. This contempt had stemmed, as we have seen, from her adherence to the social Darwinist view of the blacks as ‘large-jawed’, ‘foreheadless’, ‘monkey-faced’ savages.<sup>272</sup> Basing these depictions on the work of scientists, such as Darwin and Spencer, Schreiner had reinforced the physical and evolutionary connection between the blacks and anthropomorphous apes. Agreeing with the supposition that man had descended from an ape-like progenitor, Schreiner not only acknowledges that, while the whites had risen in the chain of being, the ‘natives’ still closely resembled their ancient predecessor, but also that they would eventually melt away in their collisions with higher races. However, during her time away, Schreiner began to comprehend the ‘vices and virtues’ of both countries and their peoples, and to see the Boers, British and ‘natives’- and their respective ‘problems’- from a different perspective.

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<sup>269</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 29; p. 15.

<sup>270</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 29.

<sup>271</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 15.

<sup>272</sup> *Undine*, p. 200.

Convinced that the key to these problems lay in the past, Schreiner employs the opening chapters of *Thoughts* to explicate the ‘how and why of [the] existence’ of the Boers, British and blacks in South Africa. She also uses them to explore ‘how and why’ the arrival of the whites had had an iniquitous and bloody effect on the existence of the ‘natives’. Taking her readers on a literary journey through South Africa, Schreiner rescues the vestiges of the resultant unrest between the whites and the blacks, and draws attention to the ‘social conditions’ and ‘passions’ that had maintained it up until the present day. As well as disclosing ‘how and why’ they were significant to South Africa’s present and had allowed Britain to take control of its land and mineral wealth, Schreiner’s travels also inadvertently accentuate the key developments in her thinking. By taking a hard look at the composition and growth of each territory and state, Schreiner overcomes her past criticisms of the Boers and natives- and her previous pro-British stance- and gives a balanced analysis of Europe’s incursions into South Africa. Citing these incursions as key events in the country’s history, she weighs up the positives and negatives of the British and the Boers’ arrival in South Africa, and probes their effect on its physical and racial landscape.

Starting in the Western Province of the Cape Colony, Schreiner points up the physical relics- the streets, gardens and forts- that marked the arrival of Jan Anthony van Riebeeck, a servant of the Dutch East India Company, and a small handful of soldiers and sailors in 1652. Having established a victualling station near Table Mountain, for the safe passage of trade between the Cape and the East Indies, these men ‘struck their roots into the soil’ and became the founding fathers of the Boer race. Declaring that ‘the sapling’ of the ‘white man’s life in South Africa [...] has an interest no story of later growth can hold for us’, Schreiner clarifies that its interest stems from the fact that she believed that Van Riebeeck and his men had made a crucial impression on the landscape, the ‘natives’ and on the Boers themselves.<sup>273</sup> Of the influence that they had on the landscape, in *Thoughts*, Schreiner praises their ability to cultivate the land, create a settlement and expand as a race. She writes, ‘Thirty years after Van Riebeeck landed there were two hundred-and-ninety-three white men in the settlement [...] [and] eighty-eight white women’.<sup>274</sup> Grumbling for ‘want of wives’, Schreiner affirms that the Boers’ presence in South Africa was bolstered by the regular addition of ‘respectable girls’ from Dutch orphanages, and by an influx of two hundred French

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<sup>273</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 62.

<sup>274</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 63.

Protestant refugees (Huguenots), who had sought asylum at the Cape in 1688.<sup>275</sup> Transforming the ‘sapling of white man’s life’ into a fully-fledged and permanent feature on South Africa’s landscape, she asserts that their arrival represented a significant turning point in the Boers’ development and a key event in the country’s history. By evaluating ‘how and why’ the Huguenots ‘made’ the Boer ‘what we today find him’, Schreiner weighs up the positives and negatives of their impact upon and contribution to South Africa’s racial situation.<sup>276</sup> Driven out of France by religious persecution, Schreiner contends that the Huguenots were ‘not an ordinary body’ of immigrants.<sup>277</sup> Arguing that they possessed the social skills- conviction, individuality, virility and power- that marked great and dominant peoples, she claims that by mingling their blood with that of Van Riebeeck and his men, they ‘ennobled’ even the lowest and poorest Boer and enabled him to become part of a ‘strong and select’ new race. Therefore, decreeing that the Huguenots had effectively saved the Boers from historical oblivion, Schreiner intimates that their amalgamation had resulted in a race that was positively ‘aristocratic’. By comparing the Boers’ fate with that of the North American States after the *Mayflower* had landed there with a group of dissentient Englishmen in 1620, Schreiner emphasises its historical significance and makes it apparent that their amalgamation was a wholly positive event. Although affirming that it was crucial to the Boers’ development, she also raises the point that their union with the Huguenots had ‘severed every intellectual and emotional tie between [themselves] and the parent lands from which [they] sprang’.<sup>278</sup> Indeed, whilst attempting to prove, in *Thoughts*, that this severance had in no way undermined the fact that they were pure-blooded Europeans nor curtailed their capacity to govern ‘States as large as European countries’, Schreiner acknowledges that the question of whether it was beneficial to South Africa was ‘too complex’ to answer. This complexity stemmed from the fact that, by refusing to mix socially or sexually with the natives or adopt their language, and by permanently and completely cutting themselves off from other European peoples, the Boers had not only sustained themselves as a separate racial entity, but had also helped originate and maintain South Africa’s unequal racial situation.

Returning to Schreiner’s journey, I explore her depiction of the vestiges of another major historical event, the arrival of the British. Whilst discussing the impact

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<sup>275</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 63.

<sup>276</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 62.

<sup>277</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 68.

<sup>278</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 63.

that they had on the landscape in glowing terms, Schreiner does, however, illustrate the extent to which her attitude towards them had changed, by examining 'how and why' their 'passions' and 'social conditions' had adversely affected South Africa's other racial groups. Guiding her readers through the Eastern Province of the Cape, Schreiner calls attention to the remnants of the scattered towns and villages belonging to the descendants of four thousand British 'emigrants' who had travelled there in 1820. Asserting that these 'emigrants' had made a large and permanent impression on the Colony, Schreiner avers that they had quickly set to work on farms or as traders. Making a positive contribution to agriculture, business and the economy, they caused new towns and districts, such as Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, to grow rapidly in size. They also established several noteworthy institutions, including a Council of Advice, which replicated all the characteristics of British law. However, regardless of their individual business successes and positive agricultural impact on the landscape, Schreiner argues that, as was the case with the Boers, there was a darker and more unseemly side to their incursions into South Africa. Indeed, not only were their successes beneficial and limited to the members of their own race- as she admits, their racial exclusivity was comparable to and as absolute as that of the Boers- but Schreiner also suggests that their actions had wider social and political implications. By attempting to enforce their rule, laws and traditions on their black and white neighbours, they 'maintained' the social and political inequalities 'originated' by the Boers and exacerbated the already hostile situation between South Africa's ethnic groups.

As Schreiner infers, in her article 'The Boer', much of the hostility and inequalities had 'originated' from the fact that both the British and the Boers believed that they had a divine right to South Africa's territories and states. Whereas the Boers had convinced themselves that the territories in which they had settled were the 'tokens' of their 'covenant-keeping God', the British had felt that they were the representatives of a 'power' that needed to implant itself 'over every quarter of the globe'.<sup>279</sup> As a result, the British, seeing themselves as a branch of a parent stock, strove to reproduce, as accurately as possible, the life that they had left behind. The Boers, on the other hand, had no interest in or loyal attachment to their fatherlands. As we have seen, by mixing their blood with that of the exiled Huguenots, the Boers had alienated themselves from the rest of Europe. Reflecting upon all they had missed, Schreiner

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<sup>279</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 70-75.

makes it apparent that the Boers had ‘shut [themselves] off [...] [so] effectively’ that their society, behaviour and politics went unchecked and unmoved by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and by the upheavals, growth, dissolution and decay of the nineteenth century.<sup>280</sup> Thus, given their apathy towards Europe and their denial of their origins, it was perhaps unsurprising that they came to regard South Africa as their homeland and as the source of their national identity and pride.

What is particularly notable about Schreiner’s preoccupation with these differing attitudes towards South Africa, and their fatherlands, is that it stresses how crucial she thought it was to an understanding of the country’s history of conflict and inequality. Whilst treating them as ‘one of the most pregnant social phenomena of the modern world’, Schreiner warns her readers of the striking similarities between the Boers and British, and of the fact that both were capable of ‘modifying the future’ of South Africa and its peoples. Recalling her own- and her mother’s- experiences as a colonist, Schreiner was able to appreciate the ‘full force’ of the Briton’s connection to and longing for his parent land. Proclaiming that these feelings were often intensified by ‘transplantation’ and were passed down the generations, Schreiner intimates that, ‘as years go by’ the British and Britain itself gained a ‘colour and size they would never have borne if near at hand’.<sup>281</sup> Similarly, her experiences as a governess on Boer farms had later allowed her to understand their identification with South Africa, their indifference towards their fatherlands and their treatment of Table Mountain as the place of their birth. By not caring for or wishing to tie themselves to any other land, both the British and the Boers kept themselves tightly bound to the emblems, ‘social conditions’ and members of their own race and severed themselves from the ‘natives’. Whilst commending their bond to their ‘birthplace’ and to the members of their own race, Schreiner admits that it made the British and Boers apathetic towards and unable to comprehend ‘anything beyond the narrow aims and ambitions which constitute[d] [their] own little world’.<sup>282</sup> Incapable of seeing beyond their seventeenth-century religious claims to the land or their nineteenth-century ambitions of global domination, the Boers and the British failed to understand each other’s ‘little world’, speak each other’s language, or respect each other’s faiths and customs. However, their lack of sympathy towards each other was, as Schreiner observes, nothing in comparison to their

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<sup>280</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 86.

<sup>281</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 64.

<sup>282</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 76.

impassiveness towards the feelings, habits and aspirations of South Africa's indigenous peoples, whose lives were supposedly too 'exotic' and 'alien' for them to understand, or attempt to understand. As Schreiner states in *Thoughts*, by taking such a racially ignorant and socially exclusive stance, and by expecting the 'natives' to submit quietly to white rule, the British and the Boers maintained unequal relations in South Africa, and put themselves and the black races at 'deadly variance' with each other. During her journey through South Africa, Schreiner makes constant references to the campfire tales, cave paintings and bone and flint arrowheads that served as a poignant reminder of this 'deadly variance'. Reflecting upon the brutal execution of a black slave, who had set fire to his master's house, and upon the extermination of entire Bushmen tribes, Schreiner stipulates that not only were the 'natives' the most affected by these struggles, but also that they were frequently the victims of war, displacement, slavery and slaughter.

Whilst these are themes that Schreiner returns to in her later works, she also argues in *Thoughts* that these events had led to each state being composed of a blend of different races. Proclaiming that in a typical household, 'Hottentots', 'Kaffirs', 'half-castes', Britons and Boers often co-existed under one roof, Schreiner uses her travels, and South Africa's past, as a means of emphasising the fact that its white and black population actually 'remain[ed] a vast, inchoate, invertebrate mass of humans'.<sup>283</sup> Describing them as the constituents of a 'plum-pudding when in the process of being mixed', she observes that they remained divided by creed, customs and language and often had more in common with 'fellows of theirs' in other territories.<sup>284</sup> She writes in *Thoughts*, that 'not only' are the white races 'not bound to the native population in their state', but also the 'Cape Colonial Englishman is absolutely identical with those in the Transvaal, Zambesia, Free State and Natal; and the Boer of the Cape Colony is absolutely identical with the Boers of these different states'.<sup>285</sup> However, as she maintains, the physical divisions between the populations of each state were superficial in comparison to the country's long history of 'internal difficulties'. Comparing this history to a man with a 'disease feeding on his vitals', Schreiner professes that in much the same way as the man 'cannot compete with the sound in body and limb', South

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<sup>283</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 55.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 52.

Africa cannot attain to any form of health and unity while it is being 'eaten internally' by race hatreds, ignorance and brutality.<sup>286</sup>

### Schreiner and 'The Problem of Slavery'

As is evident from her 'Prefatory Note' (1896) in *Thoughts*, Schreiner's main aim was to address the problems 'eating internally' at the association between the two white races and to engender British fellow feeling towards the Boers before and in the wake of the Jameson Raid (1895). Although The Raid, which I discuss in Chapter Four, reinforced her contempt for the British- and severed relations between them and the Dutch farming population- Schreiner employs *Thoughts* as a means of pointing out that Britain had a lengthy history of mismanaging, mistreating and misrepresenting South Africa's races. More significantly, she makes clear that Britain had long 'cloaked' its eyes to its own 'self-seeking', hypocrisy and perfidy, particularly in relation to its dominion over other peoples. Therefore, as well as attempting to counterbalance what Britain saw as the Boers' numerous racial inferiorities, such as their conservatism, inadaptability, spiritual connection to the land and separation from the rest of Europe, Schreiner pondered the 'self-seeking' effects of its endeavours to seize control of South Africa and its wealth. Whilst anti-Boer propaganda had inferred that the power struggles between the two white races- and Britain's intervention in South Africa- were necessary consequences of the Dutchman's 'wanton' brutality and lack of social obligation to the blacks, Schreiner challenges this by highlighting Britain's involvement in the country's history of slavery, dispossession and slaughter.

Whereas chronologically Schreiner had published 'The Problem' and *Trooper Peter*, after she had written *The Political Situation*, I discuss them first as I am convinced that, in doing so, it is possible to chart a more linear progression in her thinking on the 'natives', and on South Africa's history of black submission and white masterhood. Not only does this section weigh up claims that her portrayal of South Africa's tribes found itself beset by her own internal struggle to perceive the blacks as equals and rid herself of her earlier 'race-hatreds', but it also considers how this article ties in with her move away from and employment of social Darwinism. In addition, it looks at Stanley's assertion that Schreiner's 'thoughts' on 'race' had progressed

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<sup>286</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 58.

significantly between the writing of 'The Problem' and her later works. As she stipulates in *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, this shift had been 'encouraged by changing and more retrogressive political circumstances, and an increase in [Schreiner's] personal knowledge of black people'.<sup>287</sup> Although I agree that there had been a significant shift between these works, I believe that this was caused, in part, by her change in focus from the Boers to the 'natives'. I am also of the opinion that this had stemmed from her initial reticence about dealing with such inflammatory subjects and her fears about alienating her predominantly British audience. In addition, regardless of its focus on the Boers, her article deals with the atavistic effects of these 'changing political circumstances' on the natives in the present, and in the future. For example, whilst in the 'The Problem', Schreiner concentrates on defending the Boers against accusations that they were on a 'lower [evolutionary] platform' than the British due to their history of 'slave-owning', she also uses it to explore the ramifications of South Africa and its peoples being forced back into its former retrogressive state. Aware that the 'natives' would be the most affected by this, she not only declares that slavery was 'one of the most virulent and toxic of diseases' to 'feed' on the country's 'vitals', but also that it was responsible for creating much of South Africa's race divisions and hatreds. By drawing attention to Britain's ignorance and equal involvement in 'originating' and 'maintaining' these hatreds, Schreiner evaluates the ramifications of previous white dominion over the blacks- such as the advent of the 'half-caste'- and 'rescues' the events and issues that she feared were being replicated by Rhodes and a band of monopolists in the present.

As the majority of Schreiner's political work demonstrates, one of her greatest fears was that Rhodes was attempting to pass legislation that would coerce South Africa's blacks into 'play[ing] the part of the dumb instruments of labour', and effectively return the country to its slave-owning roots.<sup>288</sup> Conscious of the evils that he and his fellow politicians were willing to re-inflict on South Africa, Schreiner not only warns against these evils, but also uses 'The Problem' to prove that its black tribes had long refused to 'perform unremunerated labour' and were 'hard to crush'.<sup>289</sup> Whilst her detailed descriptions of the 'natives' appear unedifying and perpetuate social Darwinian stereotypes- for example, she refers to the 'Hottentots' as 'eternal children' and the

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<sup>287</sup> Liz Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman: Olive Schreiner's Social Theory* (Durham: Sociology Press, 2002), p. 71.

<sup>288</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 103.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*



‘Bushmen’ as ‘caught in the very act of evolving’ - Schreiner employs them as a means of conveying the ways in which they were ill suited to the role of an ‘unremunerated’ workforce. Indeed, giving her readers an objective overview of the ‘passions’ and ‘social conditions’ of the ‘Bushmen’, ‘Hottentots’ and ‘Bantus’, Schreiner clearly identifies the attributes that made them ‘unserviceable’ as ‘slaves’ and particularly ‘hard to crush’.<sup>290</sup> Not only does Schreiner examine ‘how and why’ previous attempts at coercing them into ‘submission’ had failed, but she also challenges the popular nineteenth-century belief that ‘white masterhood’ and white civilisation were beneficial to the ‘natives’ and necessary to their progress and growth. Echoing her earlier statement about the Boers and their presence in South Africa, she makes it apparent that ‘if it be asked whether’ white masterhood and civilisation has been ‘beneficial’ to the ‘natives’, it ‘must be replied that the question is too complex to admit of dogmatic answer’.<sup>291</sup> For Schreiner, part of this complexity originated from and was maintained by the ‘natives’ themselves.

Looking at each group in turn, she avers, in ‘The Problem’, that when the first white men arrived in South Africa, the ‘most important in number and the most widely spread of these people were the Hottentots’.<sup>292</sup> Classing the ‘Hottentots’ as a ‘versatile, lively’, ‘emotional’ and ‘gentle’ folk, she claims that white civilisation had not only had a devastating effect on their deeply entrenched ‘social conditions’ and customs, but had also disrupted their long-established distribution over central and western South Africa.<sup>293</sup> Whereas ‘good feeling’ and a mutually beneficial trading relationship had initially existed between the ‘white newcomers’ and the ‘Hottentots’, this began to disintegrate, as Schreiner notes, when the Boers attempted to wrest the land from its original inhabitants and take exclusive ownership of the Cape. Bitterly resentful of this intrusion, and of their unwarranted expulsion from the lands ‘on which for countless ages their forefathers had fed their cattle and built their huts’, the ‘Hottentots’ felt they had no choice but to declare war.<sup>294</sup> In doing so, as Schreiner points out in ‘The Problem’, the ‘Hottentots’ were either ‘exterminated or driven back’ and the whites settled down on ‘the beautiful Cape Peninsula, and in the fruitful valleys below’.<sup>295</sup> Although seemingly kowtowing to the social Darwinian notion of the survival of the

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<sup>290</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>291</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 92.

<sup>292</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 95.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 102.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

fittest and treating the dispossession and extermination of the 'Hottentots' as the 'natural' result of a clash between white and black, Schreiner highlights that they would rather risk war and death than be parted from their lands. Thus, not only does her salvation of the history of the 'Hottentots' first encounter with the Boers demonstrate that the former were 'hard to crush' and were not 'of the stuff of which serviceable slaves are made', but also that the white cultivation of black lands and peoples could be deadly, unjust and far from beneficial.

Repeating these criticisms during her exposition on the almost extinct 'Bushmen', Schreiner contemplates the historic impact that the 'tide of white civilisation' had had on this supposedly passionless and nomadic people and weighs up the endeavours of the Europeans to educate and enlighten them. Making it evident that, in spite of the best efforts of the Europeans, no member of the 'Bushmen' race had, 'in any known instance', learnt how to read or write, Schreiner seemingly insinuates that this is because 'their minds appear to be in the same simple condition as their language'.<sup>296</sup> Rescuing their language, which was full of 'clicks', from oblivion, and asserting that the 'Bushmen' had no word for 'wife', 'marriage' or 'nation', Schreiner concludes that they had 'apparently no power of performing [...] the complex mental operations necessary for the maintenance of life under civilised conditions'.<sup>297</sup> Their inability to perform these operations is borne out by the fact that the 'Bushmen' had no conception of religion or permanent sex relations and that the mothers amongst them were willing to forsake their offspring for a 'trifle'. However, even though her portrayal of the 'Bushmen' makes it seem as if Schreiner's thinking had not evolved beyond the social Darwinism of *African Farm*, her use of the word 'apparently' and her redemption of a story about an old 'Bushman's' power of mimicry brings this argument into question. Of these powers, Schreiner testifies that he was able, through a few contortions of the face and body, to successfully mimic a dozen Europeans and their 'peculiarities' of appearance and character, without uttering a word. Given his accurate mimicry of their every expression and mannerism, it seems highly plausible, that instead of redeeming it as a means of illustrating his inferiority and his close links to the animal kingdom, Schreiner is implying that emotionally and mentally he is nearer to South Africa's other races than either they or social Darwinian theorists had allowed. As she writes in 'The Problem', the 'early settlers and Hottentots [...] supposed [the

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<sup>296</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 97.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

Bushmen] to be absolutely incapable of feeling, and the Boers, and even the Kaffirs still regard them as only half-human'.<sup>298</sup> However, the old 'Bushman' contradicts these assumptions by showing that he has the wherewithal and 'humanity' to work his 'performances' to his own advantage and maintain his life under white conditions. Similarly, his wiliness and social autonomy are indicative of the reason why none of his race have made 'serviceable' slaves. Indeed, despite alluding to their 'strong sense of gratitude' and their 'powerful affection of a dog-like kind', Schreiner makes it clear that a life of slavery was fatal to the nomadic 'Bushman'. Used to wandering around in hordes or 'as solitary individuals', and used to having no 'fixed social organisation' or 'settled habitation', Schreiner confirms that if the 'Bushmen' were 'confined in European houses and compelled to wear European clothing, they [would] contract consumption and die'.<sup>299</sup> Whilst Darwin had made the connection between the advent of Europeans in South Africa and the origination of disease and sterility amidst the 'natives', he, like the majority of evolutionary scientists, was keen to blame it on the inferiority and inadaptability of the blacks rather than on the iniquitous and injurious behaviour of the whites. In spite of tracing a distinct pattern, in *Descent*, between high mortality rates and the subjection of 'aborigines' in Tasmania, Australia and New Zealand to the 'social conditions' of civilised man, Darwin is adamant that their susceptibility to illness is due to their resemblance to the 'anthropoid apes'. Regarding them as their 'nearest allies', he declares that, like 'man in his wildest condition', the 'anthropoid apes' have 'never yet survived long, when removed from their native country'.<sup>300</sup> In addition to reinforcing their similarities to the ape, and the white race's ability to 'resist [...] the greatest diversities of climate and other changes', Darwin persists in the view that, regardless of their proximity to civilisation, the inferior aborigines will become sterile or die from some other cause, such as the 'inroad of a conquering tribe'.<sup>301</sup> Whilst subscribing to these ideas in *African Farm* and *Undine*, Schreiner shows how far her thinking had changed by holding the Europeans solely accountable for the 'Bushmen's' death from consumption.

Employing terms such as 'confinement' and 'compelled', Schreiner argues that instead of simply helping the 'Bushmen' to read and write, and raise them in the scale of existence, the whites were forcing them into a 'civilised' life that was completely

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<sup>298</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 97.

<sup>299</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>300</sup> Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man: Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 218.

<sup>301</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 218; p. 221.

alien to their natures. Telling her readers about a 'Bushboy' servant, who had been 'carefully tended' in the hope of civilising him, Schreiner infers, that by curtailing his freedom and by 'compelling' him to become European, his 'mistress' had inadvertently stifled his nomadic instincts and his innate 'desire' for the 'social conditions' of his race. This is corroborated by the fact that the 'Bushboy' prefers sleeping in a 'little box' than a bed, and that this box closely resembles the sleeping 'conditions' of his fellow 'Bushmen' (dog-holes). However, as Schreiner poignantly reveals in 'The Problem', this is not the only 'social condition' that the 'Bushboy' unconsciously replicates and maintains. Like many of his fellow 'Bushmen' before him, his 'confinement' in a European house had led to him contracting consumption. Recalling his last few hours, Schreiner informs her readers that, even with the rattle of death upon him, he was determined to clean his mistress's knives. Whilst demonstrating his 'dog-like' affection for his mistress, Schreiner infers that his close proximity to European customs and behaviours overwhelmed him and were the reason behind his racial decline and death. Thus, in spite of the dismal outcome, his demise not only, once again, proves that the 'Bushmen' were not suited to slavery, but also, as was the case with the 'Hottentots', the 'incoming tide of white civilisation' had swept over and destroyed their social organisation and lives. As Dr. Story observes in a quotation in *Descent*, if the 'natives' had been 'left' to 'roam as they were wont and undisturbed, they would have reared more children, and there would have been less mortality'.<sup>302</sup> Although building upon this in 'The Problem', and placing the blame for high mortality rates on the 'incoming tide of European civilisation', Schreiner draws her readers' attention to the fact that the 'natives' were intellectual enough to find ways of surviving and utilising these major changes to their 'social conditions' and customs.

Aside from redeeming the history of the old 'Bushman's' mimicry as an important example of this, she looks in detail at the 'social conditions' and traits of the 'Bantus', who were 'still with us' and were unlikely to 'fade away'. Indeed, as she affirms in 'The Problem', even though European civilisation had broken the tribal organisation of the 'Bantus' along the shores of the Indian Ocean, the British and the Boers had had little effect on their numbers, which had not diminished but had been increasing steadily up until the present day. Not only does this uphold Darwin's assertion that if a 'weaker' race is not 'abruptly swept away' by civilised nations, it will

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<sup>302</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 214.

generally decrease until it becomes extinct, but, by making their endurance a central element of her account on the 'Bantus', it is apparent that Schreiner is attempting to shake off the vestiges of her earlier attitude. Indeed, whilst her depictions of the 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen' contain remnants of her youthful subscription to the tenets of social Darwinism, her descriptions of the 'Bantus' show her willingness to concede that they were necessary to South Africa and had 'lessons [to teach] humanity'.<sup>303</sup> Describing all branches of the 'Bantu' family- the 'Kaffirs' ('Zulus' and 'Matabeles') and the 'Chuanas' ('Basutos' and 'Mashonas')- as tall, dark, finely proportioned, strong, reserved and reflective, Schreiner presents them in a positive physical light, and insinuates that they were mentally as precise, poetical, exacting and figurative as their 'perfectly constructed' languages.<sup>304</sup> Although observing that each tribe possessed different intellectual tendencies and customs, Schreiner asserts that, while the 'Chuanas' were more devoted to agriculture and the 'Kaffirs' were more inclined to dominate and rule, they had all taken to modern civilisation with 'ease' and had an 'avidity' for learning and study. Of their ability to 'grasp' the 'incoming tide of civilisation', Schreiner points up the history of a 'Basuto' tribe living in the Bamangwato, who, under the guidance of their 'noteworthy' chieftain Kama, had risen on its waves rather than being 'submerged' by them. Describing this as 'unique in the history of savage peoples', Schreiner further notes that Kama's endeavours to protect his tribe from the 'evils' of civilisation until they could understand its 'benefits' was 'one of the most interesting social experiments which is being carried on anywhere on the earth's surface at the latter end of the nineteenth century'.<sup>305</sup> This 'experiment', which was soon embraced by other 'Bantus', included their intense desire to 'grasp' the 'benefits' of learning and study. Not only does Schreiner illustrate this by rescuing the tale of an old 'Basuto' man, who was willing to exchange his most prized possessions (a cow and a calf) in order to learn how to read, but she also demonstrates how far this desire had taken them intellectually, socially and as a race.<sup>306</sup> As she discloses of their intellectual development in a footnote to 'The Problem', there are 'cases' where 'even Bantu females, preparing for the matriculation examination of the Cape University, are not found to be inferior to the average male Europeans sharing the same course of study'.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 24.

<sup>304</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 98.

<sup>305</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 99.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 127.

Interestingly, apart from accentuating these intellectual similarities, and confirming the benefits that the entire race had obtained from grasping certain facets of white civilisation, Schreiner identifies the ways in which they have avoided 'being submerged' by its 'evils'. As we have seen, Schreiner was clearly of the opinion that two of the greatest 'evils' of European- especially British- civilisation was its dependency on and perpetuation of racial and sexual inequality. Of the former, she undoubtedly intimates that the 'Bantus' were not of the 'stuff of which serviceable slaves' were made and were too intelligent, developed and dominant to 'bow their wills' to the 'dictation' of the white man. As she deduces, 'our warlike Zulu Bantus from the East Coast would hardly have been more acceptable as domestic slaves than a leash of African lions'.<sup>308</sup> Not only that but, like the 'Hottentots' and the 'Bushmen' before them, the 'heaviest punishment' that 'white civilisation' could inflict on the 'Bantu' was to sever him from his family, tribe and 'social conditions'. Noting that his passionate devotion to his family was 'abnormally developed', Schreiner adds that 'death has, when compared to [being confined in a European home], small torture for him'.<sup>309</sup> Of the latter, it is notable that, while European civilisation had originated and sustained unequal relations between the sexes, the 'Bantus' had recognised this inequality as an 'evil' and had instead 'maintained' its egalitarian customs. Affirming that not only had the 'Bantus', even when being forcefully presented with the doctrine of private property, 'maintained' their passion for 'holding its land in common', but also that the females had 'almost the entire charge of agriculture and manufacture'.<sup>310</sup> Treating their attitude to the land and to the division of labour as 'lessons for (white) humanity', it is notable that, despite emphasising the 'Bantus'' racial potential and growth, and their similarities to the whites, she ultimately concludes that in 'both his vices and his virtues he curiously resembles the Anglo-Saxon of the past'.<sup>311</sup> Adding that at the time of the 'arrival of the white man', the 'Bantus' were in a 'state of civilisation [...] much higher than that of the Britons' during the Roman Conquest, and 'more resembling that of the Saxons before the first introduction of Christianity', it seems that, regardless of their virtues, Schreiner could not shake off her adherence to social Darwinism.<sup>312</sup> By supposing that, at the time of the white man's arrival, the 'Bantus' were in a state of

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<sup>308</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 103.

<sup>309</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 100.

<sup>310</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 101.

<sup>311</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 100.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

‘civilisation’ similar to that of the Anglo-Saxons during the seventh century, Schreiner ostensibly adheres to the social Darwinian notion that black races served as a ‘historical’ record of the past. This is borne out by the fact that she is even more dismissive of the ‘state of civilisation’ that the ‘Bushmen’ and ‘Hottentots’ were in at the time of the Dutch East India Company’s arrival in the Cape. Looking firstly at the ‘state’ of the ‘Bushmen’, Schreiner employed the relics of their existence (their arrowheads and cave paintings) as a means of intimating that they had ‘left nothing [useful] behind’, and as a reminder that they had died out whilst on the ‘path to becoming human’.<sup>313</sup> Writing about the ‘Hottentots’ in similarly derogatory terms, she argues that, although they were in a much higher ‘state of civilisation’, they too would ‘fade away’, leaving only a ‘few half-caste descendants’ to act as an adumbration of their contribution to South Africa’s racial history. Although less critical about the ‘Bantus’- and keen to emphasise that they were in no danger of being swept away- Schreiner reaffirms that, in spite of their evolutionary growth and positive racial traits, they were far from equal to the Europeans and were undoubtedly throwbacks to a much earlier stage of civilisation. Indeed, while praising their attempts to improve the ‘state of civilisation’ that they were in, Schreiner avers that the ‘Bantus’ ‘vices and virtues’ remained indicative of the Anglo-Saxon of the past, rather than resembling those of the white European in the present. Additionally, by regarding their attempts at grasping the benefits of white civilisation as ‘unique’, and by never stipulating whether this ‘social experiment’ had been successful, Schreiner not only describes it- and Kama’s tribe- in patronising terms, but also makes it appear as if no black race could actually rise above or avoid being submerged by its evils.

### The Problem of Slavery in Context

However, by taking such a negative approach to Schreiner’s writing on the ‘Bantus’, ‘Hottentots’ and ‘Bushmen’, and by focusing on its ‘evils’, such as the remnants of her racism and subscription to social Darwinism, critics and readers alike have negated and neglected the importance and uniqueness of her thinking on the blacks. As Stanley acknowledges, ‘it should be noted that the views about ‘race’ expressed in *Thoughts* were considered subversively progressive when Schreiner originally published them in

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<sup>313</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 102-103.

article form, and any sensible re-reading needs to recognise this'.<sup>314</sup> Before looking at the reasons why Schreiner's 'views about race' have not been considered 'subversively progressive', it is worth examining what my 're-reading' of 'The Problem' has brought to light. Although it is difficult to dispute that this article was rooted in social Darwinism- particularly in relation to her depictions of the 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots'- it is evident that Schreiner was trying to put these theories to a very different use than she had in *African Farm* and *Undine*. Indeed, whereas in these novels, Schreiner accepts white racial supremacy, black submission and the benefits of European civilisation without question, in 'The Problem', she uses them as a starting point to explore, challenge and critically assess conventional nineteenth-century ideas on progress and race. As she contends in *Thoughts*, Schreiner believed that nineteenth-century ideas on race had fallen into two categories: the 'bird's-eye view' of the 'stranger' (which included the traveller, colonist, visitor and her British readers) and the 'emotional detachment' of the stranger (which included the scientist and social Darwinist). Aware that her own ideas on race had oscillated between the two, Schreiner identifies the problems with both lines of thinking, and looks at how these viewpoints had shaped 'centuries' of white misconceptions about and mistreatment of South Africa's blacks. Turning firstly to the 'bird's-eye view of the stranger', which was the standpoint favoured by the majority of her British audience, Schreiner makes it apparent that by adhering to this 'view', the 'stranger' was unable to see beyond South Africa's 'prominent external features' and its 'curious [black] custom[s]'.<sup>315</sup> Whilst the 'bird's-eye view' seemingly bequeathed the 'stranger' with an accurate overview of a place or peoples, it actually obscured, missed out or failed to explain certain aspects and details. As Schreiner notes, the 'bird's-eye view' allowed the 'stranger' to 'see' the 'barrenness of the mountain', but did not provide him with the facts necessary to understand the 'curious' customs and social conditions of the black 'man who lives under its shadow'.<sup>316</sup> As a result of 'understanding absolutely nothing' about this man, the 'stranger' not only came to the erroneous conclusion that the 'natives' were beneath him socially and racially, but also that their 'customs' marked them out as 'immature', 'childlike' heathen, who had to be raised by him in order to progress. Similarly, whilst praising the scientific 'stranger' for possessing the emotional detachment and distance

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<sup>314</sup> Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, p. 71.

<sup>315</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 28.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*



‘essential’ for viewing ‘great wholes clearly’ and for carrying out a ‘keen, salient survey’ on South Africa and its ‘mingled’ races, Schreiner makes the point that ‘he’ was only capable of taking in ‘large outlines’ and ‘marking’ ‘prominent characteristics’.<sup>317</sup> Thus, although conscious of the customs, passions and social conditions of the black ‘men who lived under the shadow of the mountain’, the Darwinian stranger failed to treat the ‘Bantus’, ‘Bushmen’ and ‘Hottentots’ subjectively or view them as individual racial groups. Preferring to see them and their characteristics as part of a ‘great [black] whole’, Schreiner infers that the scientific stranger was incapable of distinguishing between each group and acknowledging that they each had their own set of vices and virtues. As she notes in ‘The Problem’, whereas ‘in the eyes of [the] stranger [...] the branches of [the] Bantu family resemble[d] each other [...] closely, those ‘who ha[ve] lived among them and studied them [can] tell a Chuana from a Kaffir with as much ease as a keen observer [can] tell an Italian from an Englishman’.<sup>318</sup> As a consequence of this inability to differentiate between and ‘understand’ the significance of their individual vices and virtues, the stranger regarded their ‘prominent characteristics’- such as their protruding jaws, woolly hair and ‘curious’ social customs- as evidence of their collective black inferiority.

By highlighting the misconceptions that had arisen from the ‘bird’s-eye view’ and ‘emotional detachment’ of the stranger, Schreiner makes it clear that the problems with these standpoints were ‘two-fold’- they reinforced white supremacy and black inferiority- and that the iniquitous gaps in their thinking could only be bridged by adopting a two-fold position towards South Africa and its peoples. Proclaiming that her own two-fold position was the result of the ‘chance coincidence of fortunate circumstances’, Schreiner insists that a ‘true’ and ‘just’ understanding of the ‘natives’ could ‘only be gained’ by one who had been in ‘long-continued, close, personal contact’ with them, and had then spent many years in ‘other lands’.<sup>319</sup> Schreiner’s time in ‘other lands’ had not only made her more appreciative of what her ‘long-continued, close, personal contact’ with the ‘natives’ had taught her, but it had also given her the ‘distance’ necessary to see them and their experiences with ‘white civilisation’ for what they really were. Conscious of the uniqueness of her position, Schreiner ‘rescues’ her experiences as ‘half-outsider’ and ‘half-lover’ to educate her readers on the historic

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<sup>317</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 28.

<sup>318</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 99.

<sup>319</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 28-29.

evils and restrictiveness of nineteenth-century ideas on progress and civilisation, and to open up and maintain new avenues of thinking on race. Indeed, aside from using ‘The Problem’ to stress the pointlessness of forcing the ‘natives’, and the entire country, back into a slave-like state, Schreiner insists that there was much more to the ‘Bantus’, ‘Bushmen’ and ‘Hottentots’ than the ‘bird’s-eye view’ or the ‘emotional detachment’ of the stranger had allowed. As she asserts, neither perspective had allowed for similarities, equalities and a common humanity between South Africa’s white and blacks, or had recognised the ways in which the ‘natives’ had overridden and defied their lowly evolutionary status. Of the former, Schreiner reveals that she had grown increasingly aware, from her position as ‘half-outsider’ and ‘half-lover’, of a historical ‘bond’ that united and hinted at a common humanity between South Africa’s ‘discordant nationalities’. As she stipulates, whilst the South African may have had little else in the ‘past history of his peoples to be proud of’, it was a ‘curious little fact [...] that of all the races which [...] ha[d] inhabited [the country], not one of them ha[d] lent itself readily and completely to the uses of slavery’.<sup>320</sup> Although unsure of whether to blame this on the climate or on the ‘untamed’ scenery, what is significant about Schreiner’s statement here is that it puts South Africa’s ‘discordant nationalities’ on an equal footing, and alludes to a shared identity that transcends race and treats them all as explicitly South African. By alluding to this shared identity, and by focusing on their shared characteristics, Schreiner uses her ‘two-fold’ position to identify the ways in which the ‘natives’ had defied their ‘inferior’ status and had proven themselves equal- and even superior- to the Boers and British. As she acknowledges in her expositions on the ‘natives’, not only were the ‘Bantus’ capable of exhibiting a similar level of intellect to the ‘average European male’ but, along with the ‘Bushmen’ and ‘Hottentots’, they had also displayed a ‘social instinct’ towards their land, tribe and labour that surpassed the highly ‘individualised’ and male-oriented ‘Northern standpoint’. However, in spite of Schreiner’s progressive attitude towards the ‘natives’ and her radical critique of the ‘Northern standpoint’, modern readers and critics have regarded ‘The Problem’ as patronising, social-Darwinist and dated. As Schreiner conceded in a letter to W. T. Stead in January 1896, there ‘have been so many misunderstandings about each article I have brought out (I mean people mistaking & misunderstanding what I said)’.<sup>321</sup> As the

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<sup>320</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 102.

<sup>321</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Thomas Stead, January 1896, National Archives Depot, Pretoria, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 29-31.

arguments of Barash and First and Scott, who viewed ‘The Problem’ as a racist apologia for the white mistreatment of the blacks, demonstrate, these ‘misunderstandings and mistakes’ have continued up until the present day. As I argue, these have occurred for several reasons. Firstly, the seditiousness of Schreiner’s views was often tempered by the fact that she was writing for a predominantly British/white audience. Aware that the majority of her audience supported the expansion and ‘language’ of Empire, Schreiner found herself in the unenviable position of trying to engage her readers whilst challenging and overturning long-held nineteenth-century assumptions about the Boers, British and blacks. Furthermore, Schreiner would have been well aware of the ramifications of attacking British ‘civilisation’ at a time when both Rhodes’s popularity and racial tensions in South Africa were at their zenith. Not only was this borne out by the fact that she had originally wanted to keep the authorship of *Thoughts* secret, but also by the ‘natural’ reticence that she had shown at having to deal with such complex and potentially inflammatory subjects. As she avers, her opinion, therefore, was ‘of necessity tentative and limited in value, and [would] stand in need of [...] correction’.<sup>322</sup> Given that Schreiner’s object in ‘The Problem’ was to prove that Britain was equally responsible for ‘originating’ and ‘maintaining’ South Africa’s slave-owning past, it is perhaps unsurprising that her opinions on the ‘natives’ were tentative and conventional in comparison. Not only does this explain why Schreiner felt the need to hide the female ‘Bantus’ success at University matriculation examinations in a footnote- she was clearly reluctant to include such controversial evidence in the main body of her text- but it also accounts for the heavy presence of social Darwinism in her article. However, as I have suggested, rather than confirming her adherence to and perpetuation of social Darwinism, Schreiner rescues its language in order to open up new lines of thinking whilst couching them in terms that caused minimal offence to her readers. An important example of this is her controversial exposition on the ‘half-caste’.

### Schreiner and the ‘Half-Caste’

Aside from demonstrating the ways in which South Africa’s ‘natives’ would make ‘unserviceable slaves’, and pointing up Britain’s involvement in the creation and ‘evils’ of slavery, Schreiner uses her article to ‘rescue’ the history of what she regarded as its

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<sup>322</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 29.

most shameful legacy: the 'half-caste'. Convinced that the 'true key to [his] position lay in the past', Schreiner looks at how he came to be in South Africa and how he has contributed to and been affected by the country's unequal racial situation. Having arisen as a result of 'sexual intercourse' between the Boer and his slaves- who had been procured from the east and west coast of Central Africa- and any 'Hottentots' or 'Bushmen' he had gained possession of, Schreiner claims that the 'half-caste' population was one of the 'most painful, [...] complex, and [...] insoluble portion[s] of our [...] national problem'.<sup>323</sup> For Schreiner the most 'insoluble portion' of this problem had stemmed from the inequalities surrounding the 'half-caste's' conception, 'peculiar' social position and lack of political and legal rights. Arguing that 'no particular turpitude' could 'be attributed' to the Boer in this matter, Schreiner not only criticises the inability of other European races to 'save their breed' when faced with 'even the most loathsome or degraded females of non-Aryan peoples', but also looks at 'half-castism' from a scientific standpoint.<sup>324</sup> Of the former, Schreiner asserts that other European races were equally responsible for creating these problems and failing to save their breed, by rescuing the history of slavery and 'half-castism' in countries such as Jamaica, Cuba, America, and in parts of Asia. By highlighting their existence in other countries, Schreiner makes it clear that to 'pretend we have never heard [of] [these matters] is hypocrisy; to be surprised at them [and treat them as explicitly South African] is folly'.<sup>325</sup> Of the latter, by looking at 'half-castism' from a scientific standpoint, Schreiner simultaneously offers her readers her take on the physiological, intellectual and moral consequences of the 'admixture' of Aryan and non-Aryan races whilst putting forward a more overt and comprehensive critique of science, social Darwinism, white civilisation, white masterhood and black submission.

Indeed, in comparison to the reticent approach that she had taken earlier in her article, particularly in relation to her depictions of the 'Bantus', 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen', Schreiner's views regarding the 'half-caste' and the intermingling of Aryan and non-Aryan peoples were less ambiguous and less open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. As Schreiner had noted in 'The Value of Human Varieties' (1901), which was written as a continuation to her treatise on 'half-castism', the letters that she had received, 'from whatever part of the world, understood from how profoundly

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<sup>323</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 108.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 106.

sympathetic a standpoint [the] condition had been considered'.<sup>326</sup> As these letters, and her 'standpoint' in *The Political Situation* and *Trooper Peter*, show, Schreiner had found herself able to 'overcome' her natural tentativeness about 'rescuing' these subjects, when she was convinced that they needed addressing urgently, or were in need of an equitable solution. However, it is important to note that, whilst Schreiner ultimately rejects nineteenth-century scientific assumptions about miscegenation and the crossing of races, she remains acutely conscious of her audience and is careful to avoid offending and alienating her readers. Indeed, describing 'half-castism' as 'one of the most vital and wide-reaching [questions] which lie[s] before the human intellect for solution', Schreiner makes it clear in 'The Problem', that it was, 'as yet', a question that science had not begun to raise the 'skirt' of or given any 'really definite answer to'.<sup>327</sup> By using terms like 'as yet', and by suggesting the 'extensive' experiments which could be carried out in order to give definitive answers about the consequences of 'half-castism', Schreiner appears to reaffirm her allegiance to and place her faith in the science of 'ages to come'. In doing so, she not only keeps her readers on side by softening her criticisms of several facets of scientific thought, which I discuss in detail shortly, but also situates her ideas, their language and flesh, within a social Darwinian framework. As she intimates, to obtain any 'really exact knowledge' on whether the 'half-caste' was better, worse, different or similar to either of its parent species, it would be necessary to place individuals of Aryan, non-Aryan and mixed blood in identical conditions, with no knowledge of any history that might modify their development. Yet, by concluding that the human race was unlikely to 'undertake' such an impractical and momentous experiment 'during the next millennium', Schreiner informs her readers that she had no choice but to fall back on 'cruder and less scientific methods'. Thus, having again rejected the scientific 'detachment' of the Darwinian stranger, Schreiner finds herself compelled to 'study' and draw attention to the remarkable 'universality' and 'unanimity' of the 'bird's-eye view'. Despite dismissing this 'view' as 'vulgar', and as having been instigated and 'maintained' by 'rough, ungeneralized human experience', Schreiner proclaims that, in whatever country the 'half-caste' is known and whoever his ancestors were, he has been labelled as anti-social by nature and as possessing the 'vices of both parent races and the virtues of neither'.<sup>328</sup> Aware that he

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<sup>326</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 352.

<sup>327</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 109.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

was seen as dishonest, licentious, untrustworthy and cowardly, Schreiner rescues his history in South Africa and employs her position as ‘half-outsider’ and half-lover’ to consider the true vices and virtues of both the ‘half-caste’, and this ‘popular’ point of view. Acknowledging that this view would not have been ‘universally received were there not some specious appearances in its favour’, Schreiner declares that, superficially at least, there were certain factors- such as the high and disproportionate numbers of ‘half-caste’ prostitutes and convicts- that seemed to confirm their inherent ‘anti-sociality’ (sic) and depravity. Whilst unable to contradict this seemingly incontrovertible data, Schreiner does, however, raise the question of whether these characteristics were the result of the ‘half-caste’s’ intermingled blood or were dependent on external and changeable circumstances.

Looking in depth at the latter in ‘The Problem’, she remained convinced that the ‘bird’s eye view’ had not only led to the unequal treatment of the ‘half-caste’, but also that there were several external and changeable circumstances ‘that would account’ for his ‘lower social attitude’.<sup>329</sup> Arguing that these circumstances were originated and maintained by social and racial inequality, Schreiner turns her attention to the iniquitous conditions surrounding the half-caste’s birth. Not only does she make it apparent that ‘he’ came into the world as the result of a crudely physical union, which was devoid of ‘intellectual sympathy and kinship’ and based on the ‘most undifferentiated sex instinct’, but also that he had ‘risen’ from the unequal relationship between master and servant and between European and non-European.<sup>330</sup> Having first seen light in a slave’s compound, the ‘half-caste’ soon became privy to the fact that he had ‘entered a world in which there was no place [...] for him’ and that he did not belong to either the black group, ‘who ate their food in the kitchen doorway’, or to the white, who ate in the great dining-hall.<sup>331</sup> Treated as either a mistake or as a ‘useful tool’ by his father (the white master) and conscious that his mother (the submissive slave) was not of the same racial group as himself and often had her own (black) husband and family, the ‘half-caste’ came to the conclusion that, externally, he was class-less, nation-less, tradition-less, colour-less and society-less. Whilst, with the passing away of slavery, ‘his’ position had improved on that of his ‘first progenitor’- he was able to marry within his own uncertain type, own a home and have children- it was, as Schreiner concedes in ‘The

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<sup>329</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 111.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

Problem', still 'not analogous [...] with that of any folk of pure-bred race'.<sup>332</sup> Contrasting the 'half-caste's' position with that of the 'Bantu', Schreiner insists that even when severed from his tribe and trampled under the feet of a race that does not understand or value him, the 'despised' 'Kaffir' still feels himself part of a great people, 'in whose eyes [...] he is one of the goodliest [...] creatures on God's earth'.<sup>333</sup> Having grown up with a 'solid matrix about him', the 'Bantu' had a set of social standards and ideals to hold on and live up to, and was bound to his nation with bonds of honour and love. In addition, despite possessing a standard of sexual virtue different to 'our own', Schreiner argues that even when the 'Bantu' female is brought into contact with British soldiers or 'draggled under the feet of our savage civilisation in European seaport towns', she refuses to prostitute herself or gravitate towards self-abandonment.<sup>334</sup> Thus, as Schreiner points out, given the 'half-caste's' lack of racial traditions and pride, it was hardly surprising that 'she' had failed to save herself from this degradation, and had felt no shame in bringing children into the world as her own ancestors had been brought.

By considering the iniquitous circumstances behind his birth and the ways in which he differs from the pure-bred 'Bantu', Schreiner overturns the popular verdict on the 'half-caste's' inherent depravity and ascertains that, in his external conditions, there were 'causes more than adequate' to account for his vices and 'low development in social feeling'.<sup>335</sup> Indeed, not only could the 'half-caste's' cowardice, inveracity and licentiousness be accounted for by his lack of social identity, social unity and by his ostracism from South Africa's other racial groups, but also they could have originated from and been maintained by his own self-loathing. As Schreiner concludes in 'The Problem', 'He alone of all living creatures' is at war within himself and 'despises his own blood [...] If it were possible for him with red-hot pincers to draw out every ounce of flesh that was black [...] in most cases he would do it'.<sup>336</sup> By despising his own blood and black flesh, the 'half-caste' simultaneously shuns the race that would accept him (black) whilst being shunned by the race that he admires the most (white). As a result, he becomes, in the words of Schreiner, South Africa's 'rogue elephant'. Recounting the well-known history of an elephant that had been 'expelled from his herd and compelled to walk alone', Schreiner affirms that up until the point of separation he

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<sup>332</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 112.

<sup>333</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 113.

<sup>334</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 114.

<sup>335</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 116.

<sup>336</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 112.

had been of a mild and retiring nature, but had quickly become ill tempered, anti-social and violent. Claiming that whilst the ‘half-caste’ remains severed from South Africa’s ‘herds’, he will act like a ‘rogue elephant’ and constitute a social threat, Schreiner makes it clear that this danger will continue until both his external circumstances and the outdated ‘bird’s-eye view of the stranger’ are addressed and redressed. Additionally, Schreiner argues that this viewpoint not only fails to allow for the fact that anybody becoming separated from their herd, and subjected to such unequal living and social conditions, could potentially turn into a rogue elephant, but also that there were numerous exceptions to the rule. Of the former, she intimates, through the use of ‘we’ and ‘our’, and by taking her readers through the common stages of European racial and national development, that, without moral and social training, this rogue behaviour could happen to the British/white Europeans as easily as it had happened to South Africa’s ‘half-castes’. Of the latter, Schreiner confirms that, even ‘amongst the most despised class of our labouring half-castes’, she had met individuals who possessed moral beauty, integrity and fully developed social feeling.<sup>337</sup> Angry that the existence of these individuals had done nothing to ‘impugn the theory’ of their ‘anti-sociality’, she returns to her critique of science and examines its role in perpetuating or disproving these myths.

Although staunch in her belief that science had contributed little ‘as yet’ to the ongoing debate surrounding the ‘half-caste’s’ inherent depravity, Schreiner identifies the ‘one way’ in which it has lent its support to the popular public view: the law of inheritance and reversion. Referring to Darwin’s experiments on domestic animals, such as the crossing of two distinct varieties of pigeon, Schreiner states that the ‘progeny’ that had resulted from this cross ‘resembled not so much either of its parent forms, but *reverts in colour, shape and other characteristics, to that original parent stock from which both varieties have descended*’.<sup>338</sup> Alluding to a cross between a white fantail and black barb as an important example of this, Schreiner contends that their resultant offspring may be black, brown or mottled, bear no resemblance to their parent stock, or may even possess the ‘barred and white-edged tail feather’ of their original progenitor, the wild rock pigeon. Clearly leaving her in no doubt that these crosses would produce ‘unstable creatures’ with a tendency to ‘revert to the primitive original type of the race’, Schreiner attempts to apply these laws to South Africa’s white

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<sup>337</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 116.

<sup>338</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 117. Her italics.



and black races. Examining the results of a cross between a 'Zulu' and an Englishman, both of whom were characterised by bravery and the strongest social feeling, she proclaims that the natural supposition would be that their offspring would represent a compromise between and be as well-endowed in the above qualities as either 'parent variety'. However, if, as she notes, the law of reversion holds with 'human creatures', and the progenitor of both races is of a lower order with regards to social feeling and courage, then it is probable that their offspring would revert to that lower type. Thus, according to Schreiner, by reverting to that lower type, the 'vulgar dictum, that the half-caste is more anti-social than [...] his parent forms would in this case be naturally and scientifically true'.<sup>339</sup> Yet, firmly of the opinion that this 'dictum' worked in theory but not in practice, Schreiner sets about drawing attention to 'cases' in which the half-caste's reversion to a lower type was neither 'naturally' nor scientifically true'. Recalling the case of a self-educated gentleman of 'Kaffir' and English blood who had risen to a position of high trust, Schreiner insists that not only had he displayed many of the virtues of both races, such as courage, pride and intelligence, but also that he had possessed none of the vices usually associated with 'half-castism'. In addition, Schreiner investigates the effect that the law of reversion had on the crossing of two white European races, and looks at whether this had any 'bearing' on the issues surrounding 'half-castism'. Whereas her assumptions regarding reversion and the European races emulated social Darwinian thinking- Schreiner believed that any retrogression would be minimal and that any offspring would be of unusual virility and power- she actually uses these assumptions to highlight the inadequacy of science at proving or disproving the 'half-caste's' congenital 'anti-sociality'. Indeed, as she intimates in 'The Problem', whilst it may seem as if the crossing of two white races represented the crossing of two distinct varieties, the 'inhabitants of Europe' were already 'so intermixed that no invariable characteristic divide[d] one from another'.<sup>340</sup> Rescuing the twelve hundred years of history preceding and following the Christian era, which saw 'wave after wave of Aryan humanity' sweep over the land and form the 'great conglomerate European family', Schreiner decrees that only those ignorant of the past would consider the 'national lines' of conquest, politics, language and manners as anything other than 'comparatively superficial' demarcations.<sup>341</sup> Treating the majority

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<sup>339</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 117.

<sup>340</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 118.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

of Europe as a 'homogenous mass', she avers that if any reversion did take place it would only carry their offspring back to an ancestor who was endowed with as much social feeling and courage as their latest descendants. She also insists that this had no bearing 'whatsoever' on the crossing of widely severed varieties.

Although acknowledging that there were 'certain circumstances' that might suggest that widely severed varieties would regress to a primitive ancestral type, Schreiner remained unconvinced that the law of reversion could be applied to 'human creatures', particularly the 'half-caste'. Steadfast in her belief that his retrograde behaviour was the result of external, rather than internal, conditions, she was not only adamant that science had failed to 'demonstrate' that a 'congenital defect' had 'made [him] what we find him', but also that her analysis of the 'half-caste' would ultimately prove beneficial.<sup>342</sup> Indeed, by illustrating that the 'half-caste's' 'anti-sociality' was not inherent, Schreiner believed that she would encourage her audience, who often had an illogical aversion to inherited defects, to regard him with 'greater kindness'. As well as encouraging this 'kindness', she wanted to wake her readers up to the 'anti-sociality' of mingling South Africa's 'breeds' and to 'bring home' their 'racial responsibility' for him. As she points out in 'The Problem', both the British and the Dutch had brought the 'half-castes' ancestors to South Africa for 'their own purposes' and had made them a 'permanent' feature on the country's racial landscape by inoculating them with their blood. Unlike South Africa's other races, the 'half-caste' was 'here' because 'we' (the whites) 'have made him'.<sup>343</sup> Comparing him to a self-inflicted, gangrenous wound, which was eating away at the country's 'flesh' and would not heal whilst its peoples shut their eyes to it, Schreiner makes it apparent that it was not the 'black man's sin' that had created it but the 'white man's degradation'. Acting as a permanent reminder of the 'white man's' disgrace and depravity, Schreiner examines Britain's equal involvement in this 'heritage of suffering' and draws attention to the other victims of South Africa's legacy of degradation: the 'half-castes' who had married into the white race. Whether the result of slavery, degradation or rare lawful intermarriages, the descendants of these 'half-castes' were often beautiful, cultured and highly intelligent, and were 'almost purely white'.<sup>344</sup> Whereas this statement appears to draw attention to Schreiner's own prejudices here, she is using it to reinforce the reason

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<sup>342</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 121.

<sup>343</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 122.

<sup>344</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 123.

why their position was, as she declared in 'The Problem', one of 'pain and [great] difficulty'.<sup>345</sup> Suggesting that these difficulties had arisen from the strong 'Aryan prejudice' against colour, she confesses that these individuals frequently found themselves forced to conceal their ancestry, taunted about their descent and rejected by those that they desired. As she verifies, it was on the 'side of sex affections' and marriage that the 'ancestral shadow loom[ed] large'.<sup>346</sup> Thus, regardless of whether 'half-castism' was the consequence of sexual depravity or intermarriage, or whether their descendants were prostitutes or valuable and virtuous members of society, Schreiner contends that the mingling of South Africa's whites and blacks had to be considered anti-social, due to the high levels of 'unjustly inflicted and wholly unmerited' human suffering.

However, although this interbreeding had to be considered anti-social 'at present', it was possible that, in 'ages to come', the cultured, intellectual and virtuous 'half-caste' would be held up as proof that 'crossing with the dark and more undifferentiated' races would not degrade the blood of South Africa's white peoples.<sup>347</sup> As Schreiner writes in 'The Problem', 'with their possibly less developed nervous systems, and heavier animality', the blacks might infuse the blood of the future South African people with 'an increase of hardihood and vitality, and a greater staying power, which [might] enable [them] to go further in the race of life'.<sup>348</sup> Arguing that if a gardener wanted his Marcechal Niel to 'go further in the race of life' he grafted it onto the root of an old wild rose rather than onto the stalk of another rare highly developed rose, Schreiner similarly infers that by mingling with a 'more primitive type', a race might fasten its roots onto the earth. Whilst using this to demonstrate that the blacks might have 'some other mission towards humanity [...] than the hewing of [...] wood and drawing of [...] water', Schreiner not only makes it clear that she could not envisage a time when 'half-castism' would be anything other than 'unmitigatedly evil', but also implores her readers to '*Keep your breeds pure*'.<sup>349</sup> Whereas her inability to envisage the former seemingly exemplifies a return to the tentativeness exhibited earlier in her article, it is important to note that her uncertainty and employment of Darwinian language occurs at a time when she is making contentious and 'subversively

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<sup>345</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 123.

<sup>346</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 124.

<sup>347</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 125.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>349</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 125-126. Her italics.

progressive' points. Indeed, in spite of her unwillingness to expand on the point that the 'natives' might have 'some other mission for humanity' and that 'half-castism' might 'produce development and not regression', this is not, as has been suggested by Joyce Avrech Berkman, a sign of Schreiner's residual racism and struggle to relinquish her Darwinist thinking.<sup>350</sup> Instead, conscious of how far she had moved away from this thinking, by challenging both popular and scientific opinion on the 'half-caste', Schreiner's reticence was a sign of how far she felt she had already pushed her readers, and had originated from her awareness that her theories were based upon supposition rather than fact. As she avers in 'The Problem', any theories on the commingling of distinct varieties 'will be [...] for us, to-day, [...] a racial leap in the dark which no man except under the most exceptional conditions has the right to make'.<sup>351</sup> Whilst incapable of making this 'leap', Schreiner did use her 'exceptional' position as 'half-outsider and 'half-lover' to rescue the history of the 'half-caste' in order to prove that his 'anti-sociality' was the product of 'post-natal conditions', and to compel her audience to 'keep' their 'breeds pure'. Cognisant that this was a commandment little heard of in Europe, Schreiner reminds her audience that, unlike the breeders of domestic animals who could eventually eliminate the undesirable results of crossing distinct varieties, this was the only way that South Africa could ensure 'healthy' racial development and growth. Whereas critics, such as Krebs, have treated this edict as evidence of the limitations of her thinking, I believe that Schreiner intended it to act as a warning against relations between the 'most helpless and enslaved females of the dark race and the most recklessly dominant males of the white'.<sup>352</sup> Insinuating that this cowardly and reckless behaviour had been going on for centuries and that South Africa would feel its consequences for years to come, Schreiner takes great pains to point up the sexual as well as the social inequalities of 'half-castism' and develop the connection between her feminism and anti-racism. As with her thinking on prostitution and marriage, Schreiner was aware that black women were primarily the victims of white sexual exploitation. Developing this to greater effect in *Trooper Peter*, it is significant that, whilst Schreiner's thinking on the 'natives' had progressed between the writing of 'The Problem' and her later political texts, I am convinced that this was more to do with changing circumstances than a transformation in her ideas on race. This is borne out by

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<sup>350</sup> Joyce Avrech Berkman, *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner: Beyond South African Colonialism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 89.

<sup>351</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 125.

<sup>352</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 111.

her emphasis on, and the recurrence of, themes such as slavery, white masterhood and black submission and sexual exploitation. Thus, any shifts that did take place in her writing was mainly the result of Schreiner's change in focus from the Boers to the 'natives', and the urgency with which she felt she had needed to respond to the retrogressive events unfolding in South Africa. Similarly, by blaming its history of sexual and social inequality on the 'selfish passions' of the white man rather than on the licentiousness of the black woman, Schreiner dispels the myth of the 'black seductress'-who supposedly corrupted white Europeans with her dangerous and lascivious sexuality- and protests against the moral superiority of the British. Rescuing their historic involvement in slavery and in the 'present-day' prostitution of black flesh, Schreiner states that there exists in 'our seaport towns, under the aegis of the English [...] Government, a traffic between English soldiers and sailors and [...] half-caste women'.<sup>353</sup> Decreeing that 'what the Boer began the Englishman finishes', she infers that this 'traffic' was far more 'anti-social, and [...] degrading than any relation between the ancient slave-holders and their female slaves'.<sup>354</sup> Arguing that England's traffic in black flesh did not 'finish' with prostitution and slavery, Schreiner makes evident in 'The Problem' that she would deal with the ramifications of their absolute domination over a 'crushed' native race at a 'later date'.

#### Schreiner and *Trooper Peter Halket*

Dealing with this dominion in the 'later' *Trooper Peter*, Schreiner uses her novella to 'rescue' and respond to a specific historic event: the British South Africa Company's 'crushing' of the Ndebele and Shona uprisings (the Chimurengas of 1896-1897) against the expropriation of gold mines in Matabeleland and Mashonaland (Rhodesia). In spite of their historical antagonism towards each other, the Ndebele ('Matabeles') and the Shona ('Mashonas') had joined forces to rid themselves of the oppressive regimen of the British South Africa Company (the Chartered Company), which had subjected them to excessive tax rates and had dispossessed them of their lands and cattle. As Schreiner's eponymous 'hero' avers in *Trooper Peter*, 'They always said the Mashonas didn't love the Matabele; but [t]hey've got the damned impertinence to say, that the

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<sup>353</sup> *Thoughts*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>354</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 122; p. 128.

Matabele oppressed them sometimes, but the white men oppresses them all the time'.<sup>355</sup> Feeling that they had no choice but to sell their labour to the settler population, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Shona and Ndebele became convinced that the Company were to blame for the drought, locusts and rinderpest (a malignant cattle disease) that were devastating the country during this period.<sup>356</sup> Whilst the Ndebele and Shona had launched their attack on the Company at a time when its troops had found themselves diverted and depleted by the ill-fated Jameson Raid, the events of which I discuss in the next chapter, Britain's response to these uprisings was both swift and severe. As Stanley points out, this response included mass killings, brutal executions, the systematic burning of kraals and fields, the raping of women and the murder of children and the elderly.<sup>357</sup> Even after Rhodes had negotiated peace in Matabeleland and promised to alleviate the oppression and sufferings of its peoples, their situation and the structure of Company Rule remained much the same.

Horried by the way the Company had dealt with the 'Matabeles' and hounded the 'Mashonas for what they call murder- i.e. for killing people in time of war'- Schreiner made it clear that she viewed the Chimurengas as justifiable political revolts and treated Britain's reaction to them as 'far more terrible than anything that is happening in the Colony'.<sup>358</sup> Despite confiding, in her May 1896 letter to Betty Molteno, that she felt 'powerless' and that the British were so consumed by their 'lust for gold & Empire [...] [that] there [was] nothing left to appeal to', Schreiner still found herself driven to intervene.<sup>359</sup> Indeed, whilst on holiday in Port Alfred, where she was recovering following a miscarriage, Schreiner had 'opened' her 'eyes' to discover a 'sort of allegory story about Matabeleland [...] full fledged in [her] mind' and had felt compelled to jump out of bed and start writing.<sup>360</sup> Travelling to Britain, in early 1897, to oversee the publication of *Trooper Peter*, Schreiner and Cronwright had found themselves on board the same ship as Rhodes and his cohorts, who were en route to appear before a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the Jameson Raid. Although

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<sup>355</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>356</sup> Laura Chrisman, *Rereading the Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner and Plaatje* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 136.

<sup>357</sup> Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, p. 72.

<sup>358</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Betty Molteno, 18 July 1896, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 5-8. Her punctuation.

<sup>359</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Betty Molteno, 18 July 1896, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 8-9.

<sup>360</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Betty Molteno, 20 August 1896, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 15-17.

the failure of the Raid, which had forced Rhodes to resign as Prime Minister of the Cape and face two public inquiries over his behaviour, had initially delighted Schreiner, his subsequent involvement in the massacres in Mashonaland and Matabeleland had left her far from convinced that the ‘terrible power which was threatening to crush all South Africa [was] broken’.<sup>361</sup> Seemingly confirmed by Rhodes’ return to the Cape as pacifier of Rhodesia, Schreiner hoped that, by recounting the history of his conduct in South Africa, she could incite a parliamentary examination into the Company’s affairs and help ‘crush’ his ‘terrible power’. She was similarly optimistic that she could provoke the British public into revoking their Charter. Whilst aware that by indicting Rhodes and the Company by name, it was probable that they would proceed against her, Schreiner was completely unprepared for the attacks from her family, who blamed Cronwright for her views, and from critics, who were repelled by the blasphemous image of Christ discussing South African politics. As an anonymous reviewer observed in a report commissioned by Schreiner’s publishers, T. Fisher Unwin, “‘one is sorry to see so many inflated nothings put in the mouth of his [Peter’s] Saviour’”.<sup>362</sup> Thus, in spite of being encouraged by its ‘immense circulation’, and its immediate publication into a number of different languages, Schreiner had ultimately come to the devastating conclusion that ‘*Peter Halket* has been [...] a dead failure’.<sup>363</sup> Not only had the Committee of Inquiry ruled the matters discussed in her book as out of their jurisdiction, but also, as she admitted in an 1898 letter to her brother Will, she did ‘not believe [that] it [had] saved the life of one nigger’.<sup>364</sup> However, regardless of *Trooper Peter’s* apparent artistic and political ‘failings’, I explore Schreiner’s attempts at trying to ‘save the lives’ of the ‘niggers’ in Mashonaland and Matabeleland, and look at how her depictions of the Shona and Ndebele peoples compare to her portrayal of the ‘Bantus’ in ‘The Problem’. In addition, I not only consider her redemption of history, but also examine her development and maintenance of the themes that had originated in *Thoughts*. These themes include the iniquities of interracial relationships, racial and sexual exploitation, enforced labour, white masterhood and black submission and her dissatisfaction with Darwinism and evolutionary science.

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<sup>361</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to John T. Lloyd, 1896, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 6-7.

<sup>362</sup> Quoted in Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, p. 73.

<sup>363</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Philip (“Will”) Schreiner, 29 June 1898, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, line 76.

<sup>364</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Philip (“Will”) Schreiner, 29 June 1898, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 77-78.

Before doing so, I want to outline the plot of *Trooper Peter*. Peter is a young, working-class Briton, who had come to South Africa in the hope of making his millions. Following time spent working for a prospector at the Cape's diamond mines, he enlists as a mercenary for Rhodes' Chartered Company, which is then occupied with subduing the resistance in Matabeleland. Finding himself separated from his troop, he spends a night alone on the veldt, where he meets an unnamed man, whom Schreiner leads her readers to assume is Jesus Christ. As I discuss, it is through his conversations with this Christ-like figure that Peter becomes aware of the evils of colonialism, monopoly capitalism and British imperial expansionism, and is forced to face up to his own involvement in perpetuating them. Of the latter, Lewis Samuel Feuer identifies in *Imperialism and the Anti-Imperialist Mind* (1989), that there were two major sub-types of imperialism: progressive and regressive. Whereas the British public were convinced that their imperialist endeavours in South Africa were based on 'progressive' motives and were aimed at elevating the living standards and culture of colonised peoples, Schreiner makes it apparent that the Company's motives were actually 'regressive' and were based on the conquest, unequivocal exploitation, extermination and displacement of 'undesirable' peoples.<sup>365</sup> As Peter himself notes of these two sub-types of imperialism:

They say, 'If we get the British Government here, they'll be giving the niggers land to live on; and let them have the vote, and get civilised and educated, and all that sort of thing; but Cecil Rhodes, he'll keep their noses to the grindstone [...] They say he's going to parcel them out, and make them work on our lands whether they like it or not- just as good as having slaves [...] I think it's an awfully good move. We don't come out here to work; [...] we've come here to make money, and how are we to make it, unless you get niggers to work for you.'<sup>366</sup>

What is interesting about Peter's speech, here, is that, in comparison to *Thoughts*, which deals with South Africa's theoretical return to slavery, *Trooper Peter* illustrates the ways in which Rhodes and his Chartered Company were actively carrying this out and were forcing the 'natives' into a retrogressive, slave-like state. This is further illustrated by Peter's ownership of a 'couple of nigger girls', whom he had

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<sup>365</sup> Lewis Samuel Feuer, *Imperialism and the Anti-Imperialist Mind* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>366</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 17.



bought during his time working for a prospector: one who was only a 'slip of a girl' and the other who was a thirty-year-old wife and mother of two.<sup>367</sup> Whilst extolling the virtues of owning these 'nigger gals'- as he informs 'Jesus', 'It's better fun [...] having these black women than whites. The whites you've got to support, but the niggers support you'- Schreiner rescues Peter's history of white masterhood to, again, demonstrate the ways in which the 'natives' were ill-suited to the role of serviceable slaves.<sup>368</sup> Despite declaring that both 'niggers' had caused him 'bother enough', he recalls that the older woman had initially submitted to and respected his authority. Not only had she kept her 'nose to the grindstone' and 'made them a garden', which had kept them well stocked with food and had supported them financially, but she had also 'picked up English quicker than he had 'picked up her lingo' and had taken to wearing a dress and shawl. However, as Schreiner points out, by appropriating the 'language' and trappings of 'white civilisation', and by convincing Peter of her willingness to surrender to white rule, she was able to turn her sexual exploitation to her own advantage and trick him into helping her and the younger girl to escape. She not only successfully persuades Peter that the 'nigger man' hanging around their hut was a complete stranger, but also uses the physical evidence of their iniquitous relationship- her pregnancy- to inveigle gun cartridges from him. Telling him that she needed the cartridges to induce an 'old nigger woman', who allegedly wanted them for her son who was going elephant hunting, to continue carrying water for her, Peter begrudgingly confesses to 'Jesus' that she had 'got over me [...] because she was going to have a kid'.<sup>369</sup> Acknowledging that this was not the only time that his servants had 'gotten over' him, Peter recalls that as soon as he had gone off to fight in Matabeleland, the women had 'skooted' with 'every ounce of ball and cartridge' they could 'loot' from his hut.<sup>370</sup> Oblivious to the resistance mounting in his home, and to his own comparable 'looting' of the two women, Peter is mortified to discover that they had gone off with the 'nigger man', who turns out to be the elder woman's husband, and that they had left their shawls and dresses 'kicking about' on the floor. Bewildered by their desertion, particularly as he had never hit them and had treated them 'well', Peter struggles to accept that they were capable of autonomous feelings and deeds, that they would rather 'go back' to their own community than remain under white rule and that they were as adept at resisting white

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<sup>367</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 13.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 14.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*

colonisation as their male counterparts. By denying their autonomy and common humanity- it does not occur to Peter that the elder woman might miss her family as much as he misses his mother- he not only mistakenly regards the ‘nigger man’ as the ‘agent and cause of his downfall’, but also refuses to treat the women as his equals.<sup>371</sup> By failing to see them as his equals, and by failing to see that he was responsible for their rebellion and his own ‘downfall’, Schreiner uses Peter’s history as a ‘slave-owner’ to meld her feminist and racial concerns, and reaffirm the observations that she had made about the ‘Bantus’ and ‘half-castism’.

Although unable to preserve themselves from the ‘incoming tide’ of white civilisation, the two women had proven that they were the intellectual equals of the ‘average’ European male, by getting the better of Peter, learning his language so quickly, being superior providers and resisting being submerged by its evils. These evils included the origination and perpetuation of interracial relationships and ‘half-castism’. Predicated upon exploitation, racism, power imbalances, self-destruction and non-reciprocity, Schreiner makes it apparent, in an 1896 letter to politician Jan Smuts, that these relationships would ‘go on’ in their ‘least desirable form’ until both races were socially and politically equal and their commingling was the result of ‘vast affection and sympathy’.<sup>372</sup> Intimating that Peter was maintaining interracial relations in their ‘least desirable form’, Schreiner focuses on the anti-social actions behind ‘half-castism’ rather than on the ‘anti-sociality’ of ‘half-castism’ itself. Whilst, again, blaming these actions- and the women’s subsequent pregnancies- on the sin and passions of the white man, Schreiner emphasises Peter’s obliviousness to his own wrongdoing. She also highlights his attempts to draw ‘Jesus’ attention to the heartlessness and immorality of the black ‘Bantus’. Disgusted that the women had fled when they were months from giving birth, Peter informs ‘Jesus’ of his suspicions that they would ‘do away’ with the babies before they were born. Stating that ‘they’ve no hearts’ and that ‘they’d think nothing of doing that with a white man’s child’, Peter vocalises the Darwinian view that black women lacked maternal feeling and readily disposed of their young.<sup>373</sup> He similarly overlooks the pain and evil that had resulted from his ‘heartless’ impregnation of his ‘Mashona’ ‘slaves’. Thinking nothing of having sex with them and impregnating them with his child, Peter fails to appreciate

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<sup>371</sup> Chrisman, p. 140.

<sup>372</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Jan Smuts, 1 July 1896, National Archives Repository, Pretoria, Olive Schreiner Letters Project Transcription’, lines 18-24.

<sup>373</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 15.

that his actions had to be ‘borne by others’ and that the black women’s desertion might have been triggered by their desire to shelter their young from the stigma of ‘half-castism’. Perhaps keen to abscond to a (black) community that was more likely to accept them, it seems likely that the women had wanted to raise their children within a solid social matrix and protect them from the degradation and exploitation that they themselves had suffered. However, it is important to note, that like the ‘Bantu’ women in ‘The Problem’, Peter’s ‘slaves’ had clung onto their ‘racial pride’ and had refused to ‘gravitate towards sexual abandonment’. Inferring that it was Peter who had abandoned his ‘racial pride’ and ‘social virtue’ during his time working for a private prospector, Schreiner not only attacks the Darwinian notion of British moral superiority, but also insists that his descent into ‘absolute degradation’ was due to his proximity to gold rather than his proximity to black sensuality.

This is reinforced by the fact that, before meeting the stranger, he is utterly obsessed with making money. Sitting by the fire mulling over his business prospects, Peter decides that the best way of making his millions is to start his own syndicate. Unsure of how to begin this syndicate and sell his shares, Peter’s mind grows hazy and his thoughts merge into a ‘chain of disconnected pictures’. Flitting between his British pastoral childhood and his wanton destruction of South Africa’s land and peoples, Peter’s mind lingers briefly over the fires that he had made to ‘burn the natives’ grain by’ and his mother’s fat ducks waddling down a path surrounded by green grass.<sup>374</sup> In doing so, Peter not only inadvertently links the fatness of his mother’s ducks with the purposeful starvation of the Shona and Ndebele peoples, but also contrasts the luxuriance of their environs with the barrenness of Mashonaland and Matabeleland. In addition, as his thoughts wander between the blown off skull of an old ‘Mashona’, the dynamiting of a cave and the cries of dying women and children, the reader is compelled to make the connection between Peter’s deployment of his maxim gun and his employment of a reaping machine in Britain. Thinking that ‘what was going down before [him] was not yellow corn, but black man’s heads’, his transformation of reaping into the ‘mechanistic’ slaughter of Ndebele and Shona peoples echoes, according to Burdett, Rhodes’ real-life quelling of resistance in Pondoland, during which he ordered troops to decimate fields of maize with maxim guns.<sup>375</sup> It similarly contradicts Peter’s

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<sup>374</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 10.

<sup>375</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 10. See Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 126.

‘defensive’ claims that Britain and South Africa were, in the words of Chrisman, ‘distinct and incomparable spheres’.<sup>376</sup> Of the latter, despite declaring that ‘it was all so different in England from South Africa’, Peter finds his own belief in the gap between the two countries shaken by his and another soldier’s violation of a pretty, young black woman with a baby on her back. Whilst defending this rape on the grounds that they had not shot her, that a ‘black woman wasn’t white’ and that they ‘couldn’t be expected to do the same sort of things here as there’, Peter’s inability to justify this behaviour to his mother illustrates his inability to separate his colonial life in Rhodesia from his village upbringing. Although failing to notice the parallels between his desperation to save his washerwoman mother from the exploitation of ‘those stuck up nincompoops of fine ladies’ and his own exploitation of the ‘nigger’ women, Peter does credit his village upbringing with turning him against the ‘darkest’ recesses of the Chartered Company’s expansionism in Rhodesia: floggings and hangings. Acting as his conscience throughout the novella, Schreiner infers that it was the loving ministrations and humanitarian British influence of Peter’s mother that had not only prevented him from flogging his ‘slaves’ and thinking ‘it’s the best fun out to see the niggers kick’, but that had also made him so receptive to the teachings of ‘Jesus’. As Peter notes of his aversion to the hanging of three native spies ‘up Bulawayo way’, ‘My mother never even would kill our ducks [...] and she was always drumming into me; - don’t hit a fellow smaller [...] [or] weaker than yourself; [and] don’t hit a fellow unless he can hit you back’.<sup>377</sup> As a result of having this drummed into him, Peter is keen to distance himself from the killing spree in Bulawayo. He does so by repeatedly reassuring ‘Jesus’ that he ‘wasn’t there’ and by offering up two versions of the ‘niggers’ being made to ‘jump down from the tree and hang themselves’.<sup>378</sup> Of these two versions, Peter alerts ‘Jesus’ to the fact that a man, who was present during the hangings, had told him that ‘one fellow wouldn’t bally jump, till they gave him a charge of buckshot in the back’ whilst another man, who was not present, had told him that all three men were ‘fired at [...] just after they jumped’.<sup>379</sup> Whilst the latter offers a more humanitarian interpretation of events, and casts the Chartered Company in a better light, it illustrates the extent to which their actions had been obfuscated by propaganda and word of

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<sup>376</sup> Chrisman, p. 136.

<sup>377</sup> *Trooper Peter*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>378</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 16.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*

mouth. It also points up the ways in which the 'Great British public' had remained oblivious to the truth.

As we have seen, one of the ways in which they had remained ignorant to this truth was to maintain that they were in no position to judge or question the Company's version of events because 'they weren't there'. In order to break down this barrier and alert her readers up to the 'true' costs of British expansionism in South Africa, Schreiner included photographic evidence of these hangings in the frontispiece to the first edition of *Trooper Peter*. Depicting several Company men lolling indifferently behind the prostrate and pained corpses of the three dangling spies, publishers found the frontispiece so shocking that it was removed from all subsequent editions, and was only restored in 1974. In spite of its removal, Peter's allusions to it and to other historical stories of subjection, dominion, inequality and suffering in his conversations with 'Jesus' give weight to Schreiner's fictional narrative and make it clear, to her readers, that it had its basis in fact. Not only does she employ Peter's 'corn-into-killing image' to remind readers of Rhodes' pacification of Pondoland, but she also uses an important figure from history to draw parallels between Armenian nationalism and the suppression of the Ndebele and Shona peoples.<sup>380</sup> Rescuing the history of the Turks and Armenians, who had lived in a state of masterhood and submission for a thousand years, 'Jesus' notes that 'today the one people [the Armenians] seeks to drive forth the other who conquered him [the Turks]'.<sup>381</sup> Asking Peter what 'right' he, the Chartered Company and Britain had to exploit and make profit out of the 'flesh and blood' of South Africa and its peoples, 'Jesus' gently tries to point out how ironic it is that he supports Armenian nationalism, whilst criticising South Africa's 'niggers' for not wanting to submit to Company rule. Questioning whether he or the 'white men of England' would be willing to submit to this rule, Peter replies that 'it's quite a different thing', because the 'niggers' are black and the 'Armenians are Christians, like us!'<sup>382</sup> Leading to a lengthy debate about Christianity, 'Jesus' cleverly contrasts the self-interest of the Chartered Company, whose claims of Christian morality had descended into murder, rape and slavery, with the self-sacrifice of one of the vastest and 'strongest companies on the earth'.

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<sup>380</sup> Burdett, p. 126.

<sup>381</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 19.

<sup>382</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 20.

Made up of men and women from every race, land and religion, 'Jesus' insists that his fellow members treated each other as equals and that they were identifiable by the love that they have for one another. As a means of illustrating this love, 'Jesus' tells Peter about two of His Company's black members, one who had given away all her remaining grain in order to save the life of a younger woman and her baby, and the other who had sacrificed his life to fetch food and bandages for his injured white master. By rescuing these stories, 'Jesus' not only challenges the Darwinian supposition that South Africa's 'natives' were devoid of complex emotional feelings, but also proves that the two women were capable of love, loyalty, and racial and sexual solidarity. He similarly insinuates, in the second of the two stories, that the relationship between master and servant, and between black man and white man, could transcend ethnic and political divides if it was rooted in and maintained by egalitarianism, mutual respect and a common humanity. Of the latter, Schreiner further intimates, in her dedication to the former Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir George Grey, that relations between South Africa's white and black races could flourish under 'Imperial Rule' if it was built upon the 'incorruptible justice and broad humanity' of a 'Great, Good Man'.<sup>383</sup> Whilst seemingly advocating British 'Imperial Rule' and black loyalty to the white man, Schreiner is, in fact, using her dedication and 'Jesus'' stories to show the 'Great British Public' how far it had drifted from the Christian tenets of its civilising mission and from the humanitarian rule of Governors, such as Grey. In addition, Schreiner is suggesting that this level of loyalty and fellow feeling between a white master and black servant is only possible in circumstances where it has remained untouched by the retrogressive effects and degradations of enforced labour and slavery. As the priest in another of the stranger's stories points out, although the Boer and the Briton have not 'always loved mercy nor [...] always sought after justice', the 'little finger of the speculator and monopolist [...] will be thicker on the backs of [and more damaging to the relations between] the children of this land, black and white'.<sup>384</sup> Whereas past Boer and British rule were preferable to the present iniquitous rule of the Chartered Company, Schreiner was, as she reveals in 'Jesus'' conversations with Peter, looking forward to the day when the white man and black man will stand 'shoulder to shoulder' and say 'Are we not brethren and the sons of one Father?'<sup>385</sup> Proclaiming that

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<sup>383</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 4.

<sup>384</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 25.

<sup>385</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 28.

he was 'tired' of belonging to the Chartered Company and was ready to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the black man, 'Jesus' entreats Peter to take a series of messages to the 'great peoples' of Britain and South Africa. Making it clear that these 'peoples' included the Queen, intellectuals, women, the working classes, white South Africans and Rhodes himself, 'Jesus' wants Peter to indict these groups for ignoring the cries of the oppressed in 'other climes', for failing to enforce justice and mercy and for placing the country into the hands of men whose priority is gold.

Despite admitting that he felt unworthy to pass on these messages, on being reunited with his troop, Peter protests against the capture and impending execution of a 'nigger spy'. Begging his Captain to regard the spy as his 'brother', and return him to his people, Peter finds himself tasked with guarding and executing him the following morning. Choosing instead to feed and liberate the prisoner, who is tightly bound to a tree and is bleeding from the ankles, Peter's fellow troopers find him lying dead with 'his head turned towards the Captain's door'.<sup>386</sup> Convinced that the Captain has murdered him, his fellow troopers wrap Peter's body in his 'great-coat' and bury him under a mound of red sand, 'in which a black man and a white man's blood were mingled'.<sup>387</sup> Notably, not only have critics like Gordimer and Stephen Grey commented upon the futility of Peter's final acts- especially as they go largely unnoticed by his troop- but they have also complained that they are not 'subversive enough' due to their vindication of British imperialism.<sup>388</sup> However, I believe that this overlooks the fact that Peter has 'saved the life of one nigger' and that the commingling of their blood was the result of 'profound self-abnegating affection and sympathy'. Indeed, rather than highlighting the inadequacy of his conversion or redeeming Britain's imperial credentials, his actions emphasise his willingness to admit to his sinful, bigoted and unlearned imperialist behaviour, and to actively oppose the regressive and racist policies and practices of the Chartered Company. Thus, regardless of whether his troop mistake his intentions and carry on perpetuating these policies, and the ideologies upon which they are based, Peter has affirmed the possibility of a humanitarian alternative to imperialism, white racial superiority and white masterhood and black submission. Prefigured by the relationship between the white prospector and his black servant, who is killed by his own people for acting like the 'white man's dog', Schreiner makes the

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<sup>386</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 46.

<sup>387</sup> *Trooper Peter*, p. 47.

<sup>388</sup> See Stephen Grey, 'The Trooper at the Hanging Tree', in *Olive Schreiner*, ed. Cherry Clayton (Johannesburg: A. D. Donker, 1983), pp. 198-208.

point that, although both men die, they die side by side and as equals. Whilst failing to offer a positive alternative to the ‘anti-sociality’ of ‘half-castism’ and interracial relationships between white men and black women, it is important to note that Peter’s liberation of the prisoner stems from the fact that he is convinced that he is the elder ‘nigger’ woman’s husband. Similarly, during his conversion, he repeatedly compares ‘Jesus’ to his mother and reverts back, in the words of Laura Chrisman, to the ‘original’, humanitarian nature that she has ‘formed and bequeathed’ to him.<sup>389</sup> Representing one of the ways in which she rejects social Darwinist ideas about sex and race, Schreiner also links these two concepts by insinuating that women and motherhood offered a potential solution to, and could teach Britain how to deal with, South Africa’s racial problems. These are issues that Schreiner returns to in *An English-South African’s View*, and are discussed in the next chapter. In addition, by constantly alluding to his mother in relation to his exploitation of the two black women, Peter not only draws parallels between sexual and racial inequality, but also inadvertently connects racial and working-class oppression.

### Schreiner and *The Political Situation*

Focusing on this connection in *The Political Situation* (1895), Schreiner affirms that in South Africa it assumes ‘gigantic importance, including as it does almost the whole of what is popularly termed the Native Question; that question being indeed only the Labour Question of Europe complicated by a difference of race and colour’.<sup>390</sup> Rather than exploring these questions in detail, Schreiner instead looks at how this ‘difference of race and colour’ was employed by Rhodes and his ‘Monopolist Party’ to manipulate the Afrikaner Bond and to force the ‘natives’ back into ‘slavery under a new name’.<sup>391</sup> Whilst I examine Rhodes’ manipulation of its Cape branch in the next chapter- as it contributed directly to the events leading up to the South African War- this ‘unnatural marriage’ between South Africa’s two white races had not only caused its institutions and legislation to regress, but had also undone the progressive enactments of the past. Thus, whereas in *Trooper Peter*, Schreiner had dealt with the human costs of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, in *The Political Situation*, she draws attention to

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<sup>389</sup> Chrisman, p. 137.

<sup>390</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 26.

<sup>391</sup> The Afrikaner Bond was formed in 1881, with the intention of federating the states of South Africa into one independent republic, free from British rule and imperialism.



the retrogressive political and legislative decisions that had originated and maintained these costs.

Whilst originally reluctant to enter into public life, by 1895, Schreiner had decided that, as she observes in a letter to her brother Will, she had no option but to ‘fight Rhodes at every step’.<sup>392</sup> Co-writing *The Political Situation* with her husband, who had read the paper at a public meeting at Kimberley Town Hall in August 1895, it had garnered immense support from the Cape’s black community who, believing that Cronwright was its sole author, had invited him to stand as the ‘native candidate’ for Queen’s Town in the next election.<sup>393</sup> Yet as soon as they had published it under their joint names and the truth about its penmanship had come out, the *Cape Telegraph* and *Argus* had, as Schreiner divulges in an 1895 letter to Baptist Bishop G. W. Cross, ‘refused to dis-cuss it on the ground of its being a woman’s work’. Adding that the former had a ‘very little leader on the wrong of [women] interesting themselves on public matters’, Schreiner hints at the problems, inequalities and outrage that she would face as a female political commentator before, during and after the South African War.<sup>394</sup> However, regardless of these difficulties, *The Political Situation* reiterates the same racial and political concerns as her other works, such as slavery, interracial relations, white masterhood and black submission and her disillusionment with Rhodes, Britain and social Darwinism. More importantly, it also ‘rescues’ the history of Liberal and Progressive Movements in all colonies and countries inhabited by Europeans, in order to awaken its South African audience to the need for such a Movement in the Cape Colony, and to suggest that other ‘Anglo-Saxon communities’ were tending to ‘propel the car of state forwards’.<sup>395</sup> Listing the ways in which they were moving this ‘car forward’, Schreiner insinuates that, in comparison to South Africa, these communities were broadening their electoral basis, doing away with the lash, legislating for the welfare and happiness of their labouring classes, retaining the land for the benefit of the nation and taxing the luxuries rather than the necessities of life. By making every legislative effort to do the opposite, Rhodes and his ‘Monopolist Party’ had allied themselves with the more Retrogressive Element of the Afrikaner Bond, and had used their interracial relationship as a means of ensuring that the ‘natives’ became

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<sup>392</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Philip (‘Will’) Schreiner, 9 October 1892, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 80-81.

<sup>393</sup> Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, p. 71.

<sup>394</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to G.W. Cross, August 1895, Cory Library, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 6-8.

<sup>395</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 5.

little more than a ‘means for increasing wealth’. Indeed, by restricting their right to vote, by taxing the necessities of life, such as wheat, flour and meat, and by taking possession of South Africa’s land, minerals and public works, they left the ‘native’ with no choice but to work for the white man and effectively become the ‘white man’s dog’.<sup>396</sup> Reinforcing this through the passing of legislation like the Glen Grey Act (1894), Rhodes and his Monopolist Party not only resisted all ‘endeavours to put [the ‘native’] on an equality with the white man’, but also confirmed their inferior Darwinian racial status by attempting to pass retrograde measures such as the Strop Bill and Haarhoff’s Curfew Bill.<sup>397</sup> Of the latter, Schreiner notes that this Bill made it an offence for any ‘aboriginal native’ to walk on pavements in ‘our towns’, regardless of their occupation, and made it punishable for any ‘native’ to be ‘found out of doors [...] after nine o’ clock at night’ unless they had a pass from a Magistrate or other authorised person.<sup>398</sup> However, what was particularly shocking about this Bill was, as Schreiner points out in *The Political Situation*, that it had received the support of the existing Government. Notably, it was by offering its support to such measures that the existing Government was able to manipulate the Afrikaner Bond and gain dominion over South Africa’s blacks.

Whilst aware that her audience might contend that this manipulation was necessary, as it would ultimately lead to the dissolution of the Bond and allow the British to obtain complete masterhood over South Africa’s political machinery, Schreiner remained convinced that it came at too high a price and would cause deep tensions between ‘ourselves and our native fellow-inhabitants’. She remarks, ‘I hold that no possible accretion of kudos and racial gratification can ever repay us for the [...] demoralisation of our institutions, [...] the retrogression in our legislation’ and ‘our’ unnecessary undertakings of annexations.<sup>399</sup> Averring that one of these unnecessary annexations was the pacification of Rhodesia, Schreiner not only maintains that it did not increase the wealth of the Cape Colony or open up any new trade routes, but also that the Ndebele and Shona peoples would have benefitted more from the Boers starting a new republic there. Whilst acknowledging that Boer rule had its evils and that they were seldom just and considerate to South Africa’s ‘natives’, Schreiner insists that there

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<sup>396</sup> The Franchise and Ballot Act (1892) raised the property qualification from £25 to £75 per annum, and, in doing so, disenfranchised a large portion of the Cape Colony’s non-white voters.

<sup>397</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 26. The Glen Grey Act established a system of individual land tenure to force natives into employment on commercial farms or in industry.

<sup>398</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 5.

<sup>399</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 13.

would not have been ‘greater loss of [...] life, nor more perfidy in dealing with them, than under the Chartered Company’.<sup>400</sup> In addition, rather than bestowing the country’s riches on individuals and leaving the rest of the community in abject poverty, the Boers distributed with ‘tolerable equality’ the soil, rare minerals and valuable productions of the land amongst those who had laboured and dwelt upon it. Rescuing the history of Boer rule to emphasise the evils of colonisation under the Chartered Company, Schreiner blames the Monopolist and Retrogressionist (the Bond) for originating these evils and intimates that other sections of the population were equally culpable for maintaining them. Although conscious of their responsibility for upholding the affairs, institutions and well-being of the State, Schreiner infers that the first of these sections, the General Public, were too apathetic, too absorbed in their own interests and too ‘ungrateful’ to carry out their duties as citizens. However, reserving her greatest vitriol for the second section, South Africa’s so-called Liberals and Progressives, Schreiner condemns them for ingratiating themselves with any party that would aid them to power, and criticises their acceptance of any retrogressive measure that would benefit them in some way.

Declaring that such men were the ‘bane of the country’, Schreiner turns her attention to the section of the community whom she believed could ‘inaugurate a truly Progressive movement in Colonial affairs’.<sup>401</sup> Whilst questioning whether such a section existed, Schreiner rescues the past in order to demonstrate that ‘from the days of Pringle and Fairbairn to the days of Sir George Grey and Saul Solomon’, South Africa had not been lacking in truly liberal and advanced individuals.<sup>402</sup> Decreeing that these men had an influential following, she makes it clear that they had created South Africa’s most advanced institutions, its comparatively broad basis of enfranchisement, its beneficent educational establishments and a statute-book that recognised that all men irrespective of race and colour, should be dealt with, with an ‘even-handed justice’. Despite the lack of opposition to the steady undoing of these egalitarian enactments of the past, which suggested that the Progressives were dead or dying out, Schreiner was convinced that there were men and women in every town, village and district, who were wholly unaffected by the disease eating at the core of South Africa’s national life.

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<sup>400</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 16.

<sup>401</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 20.

<sup>402</sup> Thomas Pringle was an abolitionist who helped pass legislation that ended slavery in South Africa. Saul Solomon was a tireless defender of racial equality and of extending the multi-racial franchise. John Fairbairn was an educator who had helped establish trial by jury and the state education system.

Describing this disease as the ‘fevered desire to grow wealthy without labour, Schreiner asserts that the only reason that the Retrogressive Movement had become so powerful was because they had a leader (Rhodes) and were organised. Comparing South Africa to Restoration England, and the formation of the Progressive Party to the growth of the feminist and labour movements, Schreiner not only implies that it was desperately in need of a leader like Oliver Cromwell, but also that the time was ‘ripe for [...] uniting [...] all the scattered Progressive Elements [...] as a wide and non-parochial whole’.<sup>403</sup> Averting that politician Mr. J. Rose Innes, who had resigned from Rhodes’ Ministry in protest, was as ‘admirably suited’ to the leadership of a Progressive Party as Cromwell, Schreiner identifies the ways in which its scattered elements could be united physically and looks at the principles that could unite them as an intellectual, social and political whole. Observing that the fundamental principle underlying all Liberalism revolves around protecting the weak against the strong, and preventing the welfare of some sections of the community from being dependent upon the suffering and loss of others, Schreiner proposes that there were ‘three test questions’ that would determine a man’s fitness to join a Progressive organisation. Firstly he must want to raise the ‘native’ in the ‘scale of existence’ and bind him in a ‘kindlier fellowship’; secondly, he must want taxation to fall on the luxuries of life; and, thirdly, extend the electoral basis to prevent the unrepresented classes being ignored and their welfare being subordinated to that of the represented classes.<sup>404</sup> Whereas Schreiner’s comments on the ‘natives’ here sound patronising, and her allusions to British history and politicians seem to legitimise the need for white rule, she affirms that the former is a ‘test’ view that all Progressives must adhere to, rather than her own view, and that the Party welcomed members of any sex and race. Inviting the ‘newcomer’ as well as the ‘old inhabitant’, Schreiner illustrates how ‘progressively subversive’ her thinking was by attempting to rouse a Party to fight against the mistreatment of the blacks. It also shows how far her thinking had moved away from her earlier attitudes and subscription to social Darwinism, by inferring that they should have an equal say in South Africa’s political situation.

In this chapter, I have identified the events and inequalities that had compelled Schreiner to abandon her articles on the Boers and address the atrocities being visited on the blacks. In addition, I have shown through *Trooper Peter*, *The Political Situation* and ‘The Problem’, that there were several key themes in these texts, such as

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<sup>403</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 23.

<sup>404</sup> *The Political Situation*, pp. 26-27.

miscegenation and sexual exploitation. I have also illustrated that Schreiner's reliance on social Darwinism was not part of a 'racist apologia' but rather evidence of her ongoing rejection of it. In the next chapter, I explore Schreiner's continuance of these themes and her reaction to the events leading up to and during the South African War.

## Chapter Four:

### From 'Native' to War: Schreiner and the South African War

#### Chapter Overview

In the last chapter, I looked at how Ann McClintock's claim, that one of Schreiner's 'central motivations to write: [was] the desire to rescue history, the flesh and language from oblivion', not only pertained to her allegories, but could also be applied to her articles and pamphlets on South Africa's 'natives'. In this chapter, I consider the extent to which McClintock's statement could pertain to Schreiner's pro-Boer writing, before and during the South African War, including *The Political Situation, Thoughts, An English-South African's View of the Situation* (1899) and her allegory, 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine'. As was the case with her writings on the blacks, Schreiner rescues history to make specific political points, raise awareness of certain events and endorse particular lines of reasoning. Drawing attention to Britain's past and present dealings with the Boers, such as the Jameson Raid and Rhodes' manipulation of the Afrikaner Bond, Schreiner redeems these events as a means of raising awareness of the ill-feeling, tensions and hatreds that were eating away at the relationship between South Africa's whites and were leading them to war. Aware that relations between the white races were at their 'most critical juncture', she believed that her 'two-fold-position' as an English South African fitted her for the 'especial function' of making her voice heard and taking her share in trying to prevent war, by authenticating a particular line of reasoning. As she reveals in her eve-of-war appeal, *An English-South African's View*, this line of reasoning centred upon the fact that 'year by year the lines dividing the [Dutch] South Africans from their more lately arrived English-descent brothers [were] passing away'.<sup>405</sup> Identifying that within South Africa itself the Boers and the British were rapidly intermarrying and melding 'essentially into one people', Schreiner made it apparent that the desire for war had stemmed solely from a 'small but exceedingly wealthy and powerful section of persons [who wanted] to gain possession of the Transvaal gold fields'.<sup>406</sup> Again highlighting the evils that had arisen from their determination to possess the country's mineral wealth, such as monopoly capitalism and

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<sup>405</sup> Olive Schreiner, *An English-South African's View of the Situation: Words in Season* (1899) (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), p. 29.

<sup>406</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Sun, August 1899, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 20-22.

imperial expansionism, this chapter assesses the effect that they had on the Boers. It also considers the military interference and action that had severed Schreiner's last ties to her motherland.

Similarly, I contemplate Schreiner's endeavours to encourage the British to oppose the coming war. As she notes in an 1896 letter to her brother Will, 'If [the] [great British] public lifts its thumb there is war, if it turns it down there is peace [...] They must know where the injustices and oppression really lies, and turn down their thumbs at the right moment'.<sup>407</sup> Having faith in the power of her written work to affect political change, I explore Schreiner's efforts to gain access to, cultivate friendships with and exert her influence over several major political players, such as Sir Alfred Milner, Will Schreiner and Jan Smuts. I also reflect upon how these politicians had responded to Schreiner's overtures, and to her bids to enter into the Cape's political life and affairs. In addition, I scrutinise her ceaseless lobbying of the 'Great British public' and her attempts to encourage other women to join the war effort. However, before doing so, I uncover Schreiner's attempts to show her readers where the 'injustice really lies'. Indeed, whilst in Chapter Three I investigated Schreiner's redemption of and changing attitude towards South Africa's centuries of white masterhood and black submission, in this chapter I concentrate on the centuries of 'injustice and oppression' that had occurred and were still occurring between the British and the Boers.

### The British and Boers in Context

In *Thoughts* and *An English-South African's View*, Schreiner rescues the events that she saw as key to the growth of Afrikaner nationalism and to the iniquitous and fractious relationship between the British and the Dutch. Although employing them to different effect in each text, these events included the 1815 Boer uprisings, the Great Trek (1835-1846) and the formation of the Boer Republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. As I investigate, not only does Schreiner redeem this history as a means of assessing the events that she believed had contributed to the South African War, but she also uses it to challenge Britain's motives for originating its campaign against Dutch South Africa. Whereas British propaganda blamed the situation on the Boer's mistreatment of and lack of loyalty towards Britain and its subjects, Schreiner

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<sup>407</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to William Philip ("Will") Schreiner, December 1896, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, 'Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 37-44.

contradicted these allegations by drawing attention to Britain's ill-treatment of the Dutch and its exploitation of the tensions between them and the 'natives'. Indeed, by looking at the ways in which Britain used these antagonisms to its own advantage, Schreiner inadvertently reveals the similarities between its attitude towards the blacks and its unedifying treatment of the Boers. In her reminiscences in the Preface to *Thoughts*, Schreiner recalled that, as a child, she had pretended to be Queen Victoria, and had ordered all of South Africa's indigenous peoples to be placed behind a wall and 'shut off' from the rest of the country. Ordaining that if any black person had escaped over this wall, he should 'have his head cut off', what is significant about these recollections is that she could not 'remember planning that Dutch South Africans should be put across the wall', but was aware that her 'objection to them was only a little less'.<sup>408</sup> Incapable of differentiating between the two races, and viewing them as equally inferior, Schreiner's youthful aversion to the 'natives' was, as Krebs admits, indistinguishable from her aversion to the Boers. Whilst this was something that Schreiner had grown out of, due to her increased knowledge of South Africa and its peoples, I ascertain the extent to which Krebs's statement relates to Britain's historical mistreatment of and indifference towards the Boers. Similarly, I show that this was characterised by the same issues that had blighted relations between the British and the blacks, such as exploitation, miscegenation, social Darwinism and the role of women in resisting colonisation and imperial expansionism.

Establishing that, as was the case with the 'natives', the 'incoming tide of British civilisation' had been threatening to sweep the Dutch off their land for over a century, Schreiner acknowledges that part of the problem was that the ownership of the Cape had been passing repeatedly between the British and the Boers. Whilst initially the Boers had had no objection to British ownership, civilisation and rule, they had become rapidly aware that this 'European power' had no intention of leaving them to their own devices or leaving their 'rights of free internal action' untouched. By refusing to do so, Britain had not only, in the words of Schreiner, 'alienated the hearts' of the Boers, but had also forced them into rising against it. As she notes in her article, 'The Boer and his Republics', which was published in *Thoughts*, the first of these risings had occurred in 1815. Looking at the disastrous consequences of this uprising on both the British and the Boers, I scrutinise the events surrounding the hangings at Slagter's Nek.

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<sup>408</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 17.



Proclaiming that these hangings had set an ‘uncleansable mark’ on South Africa’s history and had acted as a turning point in white relations, Schreiner rescues them in order to emphasise the perils and injustices of British rule and to explicate ‘how and why’ the Boers had become so hardened against- and desperate to escape- it. Whilst acknowledging that Britain had bequeathed South Africa with governors who possessed self-sacrificing humanity, magnanimity and heroism- such as David Livingstone and George Grey- Schreiner insists that there would have been no white race problems ‘to-day’, if all of Britain’s representatives had dealt with the Boers with this level of tact, sympathy and judgment. However, as she intimates in ‘The Boer and his Republics’, the majority of its representatives had exhibited ‘as much of low ambition, and merciless greed, as it has been the unfortunate province of any individuals of any race ever to exhibit’.<sup>409</sup> One such representative was politician and colonial administrator, Lord Charles Somerset. Arguing that his time as governor of the Cape Colony amounted to ‘one long blunder’, Schreiner redeems the history of his rule (1814-1826) to point up Britain’s most venial and noxious defects. As we have seen in Chapter Two, these defects revolved around Britain’s fierce loyalty to its own peoples, its passionate commitment to carrying out its own methods and traditions and its inability to understand any race that it viewed as less important and virtuous than its own. Making it evident that, when put in ‘close juxtaposition with other races’, Britain’s inability to understand the ‘passions’ and ‘social conditions’ of those that they had been sent to govern turned their defects into ‘serious, [...] may be even, [...] deadly’ deficiencies, Schreiner identifies the impact that this had on the ‘brave’ and ‘free’ Dutch.<sup>410</sup> Not only had they had their land taken off them without their consent and were left with no representative institutions or language through which to make their voices heard, but also Lord Somerset ruled them with ‘autocratic absoluteness’ and absorbed a quarter of their revenue. Stating that the Boers might have overlooked these matters if Somerset had regarded them with more tact and judgement, Schreiner infers that ‘one of the things most keenly felt’ by them was his ‘arming of Hottentots and placing them under English officers as soldiers in control of the country’.<sup>411</sup> In doing so, the British exacerbated the historical tensions between the Boers and the ‘natives’, and exploited the ‘Hottentots’ for their own ends. Of the former, she writes in ‘The Boer and his

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<sup>409</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 197.

<sup>410</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 198.

<sup>411</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 199.

Republics', 'anyone who has lived in countries where [...] dark races are found side by side with white men will recognise [...] how much bitterness will be evoked by this proceeding'.<sup>412</sup> Of the latter, Schreiner intimates that by employing the 'Hottentots' as soldiers, the British had turned them into an armed labour force, who would kill the Boers and prevent their own troops from being killed. In addition, by using them to subdue the Boers, the British were, according to Schreiner, aware that they had discovered a most 'cowardly and cruel, though indirect, way' of simultaneously keeping the 'Hottentots' numbers down. Whilst constructing Britain's exploitation, and subsequent destruction, of this interesting, lively and brave 'little race' as an example of social Darwinism in action, Schreiner makes it evident that rather than supporting this 'action', she was utterly dismayed by it. However, this dismay was seemingly tempered by her recollections of the history of Frederick Bezuidenhout, who had always been opposed to the resignation of the Colony to the British Government, and had found himself accused of striking one of his 'native' servants. Although Schreiner offers no explanation or justification for this violence, and could be seen as condoning it, it is important to note that she is merely recalling the events that had led to the 1815 uprising, and had used works such as *The Political Situation* to clarify her views on flogging and corporal punishment. Similarly, in 'The Boer and his Republics', she makes the point that she has rescued this history because of its bearing on the relationship between the British and the Boers rather than between the whites and the blacks. Indeed, not only does Schreiner affirm that Bezuidenhout had refused to answer these charges, because of his strong dislike of the British, but also that he had evaded capture and hidden in a cave with one of his 'native' servants at his side.

Although Bezuidenhout was eventually found and killed by the 'Hottentot' troops who had been sent to arrest him, his friends and family passionately decreed, 'over his grave', that they would drive this 'corps' from the country and redress their wrongs. Signalling the beginning of their first uprising against British rule, which they saw as central to redressing these wrongs, a small body of farmers took up arms and swore 'never to rest' until they had banished the 'oppressors of [their] nation from this land'.<sup>413</sup> Betrayed by a spy, who informed British officials of their plans, the Boer 'commando' soon found themselves surrounded by a large body of troops. Despite eighteen of this commando surrendering immediately, Jan Bezuidenhout, Cornelius

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<sup>412</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 199.

<sup>413</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 201.

Faber, Andries Mayer, and Stefanus and Abraham Bothma resolved to flee with their families and take refuge in Kaffirland. Pursued by a British major, one hundred 'Hottentots' and twenty-two white men, Schreiner notes in 'The Boer and his Republics' that whilst Meyer and Abraham Bothma were quickly 'overtaken and captured', Faber and Stefanus Bothma were later wounded and arrested after outspanning their wagons near the Winterburg Mountains. Reminding her readers that of the fugitives only Bezuidenhout, his wife and their twelve-year-old son remained, Schreiner recalls how a band of 'Hottentots' had gathered around their wagon and 'called on them to surrender'. However, rather than surrendering, Bezuidenhout and his wife had stood side by side, firing upon the 'Hottentot' troops. Not only does this illustrate the egalitarian role that Boer women had played in the uprising- they reloaded the weapons and were determined to fight alongside their men- but also, after Bezuidenhout was 'fatally wounded', his wife and son had carried on firing his gun until the 'Hottentot' troops had overpowered and arrested them. Whereas thirty-six persons of both sexes were tried for their involvement in the rebellion, six were sentenced to death while the rest underwent a range of punishments, including imprisonment, fines and banishment for life. Despite acknowledging that these sentences were within the 'letter of the law', Schreiner remarks upon their severity, especially considering that 'no blood had actually been shed by any of the prisoners in their small and abortive rising'.<sup>414</sup> Stating that the Boers had universally supposed that Somerset would exercise his prerogative of mercy and commute the death sentences to ones of banishment- as he had in the case of Willem Krugel- Schreiner bestows upon her readers a highly detailed and emotive description of his decision to allow the hangings to go ahead. Describing the prisoners' resignation, their firm and clear voices as they sang their final hymn and the awful silence in the crowd as the drop came, Schreiner insists that none of this compared to the distress caused by the scaffold breaking under their collective weight and the men being thrown 'half-strangled' to the ground. Elated at the idea that God Himself had intervened and had given them back their men, Schreiner alludes to the deep, low murmur that had risen from the crowd as they were forced to remount the scaffold and the 'work was done'. Aside from being ashamed of the unnecessary barbarity of the hangings, Schreiner is openly critical of Somerset's decision to bury the men's bodies under the gallows rather than returning

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<sup>414</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 202.

them to their families, and asserts that it was the 'worst day's work for England that up to recent times has yet been done in South Africa'.<sup>415</sup> Claiming that, instead of consolidating British rule, the hangings had completely alienated the Boers and added to their growing feelings of resentment, Schreiner calls attention to the 'curious' differences between blood shed on the battlefield and blood shed on the scaffold.

As she insinuates in 'The Boer and his Republics', whilst even the bloodiest conflict between two equally armed foes eventually fades from memory, blood shed on the scaffold grows 'fresher and fresher' with each generation because it 'sanctifies, sacrificially, the cause it marked'.<sup>416</sup> With this cause growing fresher in their 'national hearts', the Boers were, according to Schreiner, further embittered by the 1828 enactment that their language, the Taal, could not be used in public documents, in court or in petitions to the British Government. Additionally, in 1830, when the British people voted a sum of twenty million pounds for the liberation of slaves throughout its colonies and possessions, barely any of this money reached the hands of the slave-owners for 'whom it was intended'. Asserting that, due to the blundering of officials and the rapacity of speculators, men and women who had been in 'affluence [...] were everywhere reduced to [...] beggary', Schreiner maintains that it was a matter of 'astonishment' that the Cape's slave-owners had 'so quietly' given up their claims, particularly in light of the war that had broken out in America.<sup>417</sup> Depicting this as the 'bitterest' war of the century, Schreiner not only recollects that it had occurred as the result of one half of an English speaking community compelling the other to relinquish its slaves, but also implies that 'every nation on earth' had recognised that the Boers' claims were 'wholly just and defensible'. Yet, regardless of this, what 'most embittered' the 'hearts' of the Boers was not as, she affirms in 'The Boer and his Republics', the 'cold indifference with which they were treated [...] [but] the consciousness that they were regarded as a subject and inferior race'.<sup>418</sup> Disgusted by the 'favouritism' and power bestowed on the 'Hottentots', the Boers were even more disgruntled by the fact that the British clearly considered them to be on the same evolutionary level as the 'natives'. Regarding this as the 'bitterest dreg' in the 'cup of sorrow put to the lips of a people governed by aliens', for which no pecuniary advantage could atone, Schreiner insists that this was the main factor behind large

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<sup>415</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 203.

<sup>416</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 203.

<sup>417</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 205.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

numbers of Boers leaving their homes in the Eastern Cape, to form an independent state, free from British interference and rule.<sup>419</sup>

Decreeing that amongst these individuals were the descendants of men who had already resisted the rule of the Dutch East India Company and possessed a 'self-governing instinct' stronger than in any other race, Schreiner felt that, in order to understand the Boers' problems with the British, it was necessary to 'glance' at the history of the Great Trek. According to Schreiner, at the time of the Great Trek, the Zulus were the dominant force in central and eastern South Africa and were 'treading' down other 'native' tribes and races. Thus, when the fore-trekkers first arrived in the northern districts of the Free State, these downtrodden tribes were delighted at the potential protection and assistance that the Boers could offer them against the power of Umsiligaas and his 'Matabele' warriors. However, by settling in small numbers, the Boers failed to afford the 'natives' any protection and made themselves equally vulnerable to attack. Rescuing the history of the massacre at Erasmus Drift, during which twelve Boer men, women and children were 'destroyed', Schreiner turns her attention to the 'Matabeles'' battle with the main body of voortrekkers, who were then residing at Vechtkop. Recalling the preparations for this battle from the perspective of future South African president, Paul Kruger, who remembers wagons being drawn up into squares, branches being cut down and tied together to fill in any gaps and women 'labouring with the strength of men', Schreiner uses these recollections to raise several salient points. Not only do they emphasise the equal share that Boer women had taken in trying to 'entrench' their people 'against evil worse than death', such as fortifying the laagers, moulding bullets and reloading guns, but they also highlight the egalitarian motives, social conditions and passions that had precipitated the resulting war between South Africa's white and black 'gladiators'.<sup>420</sup> Observing in *Thoughts* and *An English-South African's View*, that South Africa had 'no reason to be ashamed of the way in which either of her [gladiators] [...] fought', Schreiner calls attention to what she saw as their equal passion for and claim upon the land.<sup>421</sup> Whilst the 'Zulus' resented the 'intrusion of any other powers within [their] sphere of influence' and regarded the land as a way of extending their empire, the Boers were equally convinced that the Trek was ordained by God and that they had out-spanned their wagons in their promised land.

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<sup>419</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 205.

<sup>420</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 25.

<sup>421</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 208.

Thus, armed with equal motives, and equal weaponry- in 'The Boer and his Republics', Schreiner was clearly of the opinion that the 'best Zulu assegai' was a more than adequate match for the 'old flintlock gun'- she declares that this battle was a 'wild, free fight, on even terms'.<sup>422</sup> Before identifying the reasons why she considered this an 'even fight', I examine the ramifications of the Boers' later clash with Dingaan and his ten thousand braves.

Viewing this clash in similar terms, Schreiner recalls that, whilst one part of their 'emigrant body' had remained in the Transvaal and the Northern Free State, the rest of the Boers had passed over the Drakensburg Mountains into Natal, under the leadership of the 'most romantic figure among the early fore-trekkers', Piet Retief.<sup>423</sup> Discovering that the land was good and almost wholly uninhabited, the Boers made overtures to Dingaan to permit them to inhabit Natal 'without let or hindrance from the Zulus'.<sup>424</sup> Despite having obtained his ready consent, on the proviso that they liberated some of his stolen cattle from a nearby 'Basuto' tribe, a thousand 'unsuspecting' Boers scattered themselves along the banks of the Upper Tugela and Mooi Rivers. In addition, buoyed by his generosity, Retief and sixty-five of his followers decided to visit Dingaan to ratify their agreement. Although greeting them with apparent joy and kindness, and drawing up an agreement of permanent peace and fellowship, Dingaan ordered his warriors to overpower the Boers, drag them to a ridge of high rocks and execute them by 'knocking their brains out'. Notably, on the same day as the 'Zulus' were carrying out these brutal executions, ten thousand of their braves killed and mutilated the bodies of two hundred and eighty-two voor-trekkers and two hundred and fifty of their 'native' servants, some of whom were found with as many as thirty spear-wounds in their bodies. Pointing out that all the white 'souls' in Natal would have perished if three of the voor-trekkers had failed to escape, Schreiner claims that these men succeeded in alerting the remaining scattered parties to the impending attack. Giving them time to hastily arrange their wagons into laagers, the scattered parties eventually managed to repulse the 'Zulus', after a 'long and desperate' struggle. However, in spite of this victory, the majority of the Boers were keen to retrace their steps and leave Natal immediately. 'But', as Schreiner reports in 'The Boer and his Republics', the Boer women, who were 'always' the 'strength' of their people and

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<sup>422</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 26.

<sup>423</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 209.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*

resembled 'those old Teutonic ancestresses of our Northern races', insisted that there should be no surrender, that they should found a republic in Natal and that they would face death beside their men.<sup>425</sup> Whilst several defeats followed, the Boers eventually overcame the 'Zulus' at the 'great and terrible battle' of Blood River, on December 16 1838. Not only did this battle force Dingaan to flee, but it also signified the establishment of a new Boer Republic.

By rescuing the history of the formation of the Republics, and the Boers' continuing struggles with the 'Zulus', Schreiner, again, accentuates the resourcefulness, equality and strength of the Boer women. She also points up the free and even nature of the battles between Dingaan and his braves, and between South Africa's white and dark races. By stressing the centrality of Boer women in preparing for war, their role in helping to defeat the 'Zulus' and form the Republics and their willingness to die alongside their men, Schreiner underlines the Boers' racial strengths- such as the importance of sexual equality- whilst simultaneously contrasting them with their British counterparts. Indeed, remarking that during times of war, the latter preferred to remain in the drawing room or ballroom, Schreiner undoubtedly rescues Boer history as a means of encouraging British women to assume more responsibility for and take more of an active interest in politics and war. This is something I return to later in the chapter. Of the Boers' earlier struggles with the 'Zulus', Schreiner proclaims that their fight with Dingaan and his braves was epitomised by its evenness and by the fact that there were times 'when it almost seemed the assegai would overcome the old-flintlock, and the voortrekkers would be swept away'.<sup>426</sup> Intimating that Schreiner uses the ultimate conquest of the 'flint-lock' as evidence that the Boers were 'great fighters', Krebs further avers, in *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, that, after the Zulu Wars, the defeat of Dingaan's warriors would 'carry weight' in Britain and would suggest that the Dutch were evolutionarily 'destined' to control South Africa.<sup>427</sup> However, whilst agreeing that Schreiner wanted to draw her readers' attention to the fact that the Boers were 'great fighters', I believe that, rather than promoting (white) Dutch supremacy, she employs the history of their struggles with the 'Zulus' to illustrate the differences between their 'fair, free fights' and the iniquities of the British

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<sup>425</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 211.

<sup>426</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 26.

<sup>427</sup> Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 131.

‘blowing naked savages to fragments’.<sup>428</sup> Asserting that, after provoking war, Britain could call on a vast, civilised power to help them ‘mow down’ their feeble foe, Schreiner proclaims, in ‘The Boer and his Republics’, that the struggles between the Boers and ‘Zulus’ caused her ‘none of that pain with which the generous spirit beholds the conflict of overwhelming strength with weakness’.<sup>429</sup> Aside from criticising Britain’s displays of might against South Africa’s ‘weaker’ races, Schreiner hoped to make her readers aware that, given the struggles and suffering that they had gone through, the Boers should have been free to ‘realise their dreams’ and form their Republics without the British ‘stepping in’ and ‘crushing’ them. Indeed, as she avers in ‘The Boer and his Republics’, as soon as the Boers had settled down and planted their new republic in Natal, the British Government had grown increasingly uneasy and had issued a proclamation stating that the land was henceforth to be known as a British territory.

Confirming that she knew of ‘few pages in the history of our English imperial expansion’ that had filled her with more shame than this, Schreiner recalls the ‘bitter and stormy scenes’ that had greeted the arrival of the British Commissioner, who had been sent to annex their land. Indeed, at a mass meeting of women, the wife of preacher Erasmus Smit had reminded the Commissioner of the torment that the Boers had gone through in order to form their republic, and had spelt out the anguish and injustice that the British would be committing by depriving them of this land. Coming to the unanimous conclusion that, rather than submitting to British rule, they would go across the Drakensburg Mountains to ‘freedom or to death’, the Boers entered a region ‘which no Englishman had ever dreamed of claiming [...] [and] where no British flag had yet ever waved’, and founded the Transvaal Republic.<sup>430</sup> Whilst the British Government had formally recognised the independence of the Republic, in the Sand River Convention of 1852, and had agreed not to follow them or interfere with the management of their affairs, Schreiner draws attention to their attempts, during the 1870s, to wrest this land from the Boers and annex it to Britain. As a result of this, the Boers had gathered together at Paardekraal, on 13 December 1881, and had placed a stone on a heap, swearing never to lay down arms until their Republic was freed. Although this act marked the beginning of the ‘First Boer War’ (1881), Schreiner

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<sup>428</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 209.

<sup>429</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 208.

<sup>430</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 212.



chooses to gloss over the history of the humiliating British defeats at Ingogo, Laing's Nek and Amajuba and instead focuses on the way that Britain's 'Jekyll' and 'Hyde' had reacted to these events. Despite observing that the wiser and more far-seeing Jekyll had temporarily predominated, when British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, had restored internal self-government of the Republic to the Boers in 1881, Schreiner insinuates that this all changed with the discovery of vast quantities of gold in the Transvaal. Turning the 'eyes' of 'men of greed and wealth-lust' towards this 'little land', this gold awakened Britain's 'purbblind and all-grasping' Hyde, who, finding that South Africa had not filled his 'pockets' as he desired, had sent the armed forces of the Chartered Company to take possession of the Transvaal. Describing what followed as the most memorable battle of modern times- it was the first time in history that the troops of the 'capitalist horde' met the 'simple citizens of a state & were defeated'- Schreiner proclaims that this had opened the long campaign of the twentieth century between 'engorged' speculators and individuals of different races.<sup>431</sup> However, before exploring the 'memorable battle' that had originated this campaign, I first return to *The Political Situation* and the endeavours of the international capitalist and speculator to beguile the Afrikaner Bond 'by misrepresentation' in order to grasp the gold and land, and South Africa's independence.

#### *The Political Situation and the Exploitation of the Afrikaner Bond*

Claiming that the Afrikaner Bond had formed a healthy and desirable element in South Africa's public life, Schreiner alleged that it would have continued to do so if it had not been acted upon by an outside influence, which had commandeered it into 'enforcing its retrogressive views and methods upon the whole Cape Colony'.<sup>432</sup> Averring that this influence belonged to a group of British monopolists and speculators, Schreiner argues that they were aware that, in order to gain complete control of the country's political machinery and carry out their 'extra-colonial' plans, they would have to purchase the cooperation of 'some truly South African body'. Unable to purchase the modern and more professional Dutch South Africans, who refused to be 'blindly led', Rhodes and his Monopolist Party grew increasingly aware that there was 'but one body to whom it

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<sup>431</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Jan Smuts, 23 January 1899, National Archives Repository, Pretoria, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 46-47.

<sup>432</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 6.

could turn with any hope that it would place [them] in power': the Retrogressive Element in the Afrikaner Bond.<sup>433</sup> Conscious that it was necessary to keep this Element pacified and well in hand, Schreiner maintains that they achieved this not by financial bribes, or by offering them positions of power but by the 'simple expedient of offering to support those Retrogressive measures which without [their] aid could never have found a place on our Colonial Statute-book'.<sup>434</sup> Whilst I have explored the ramifications of these Retrogressive measures on the 'natives', Schreiner similarly uses *The Political Situation* to consider the impact that they had on the Boers, whom she viewed as the equal victims of Britain's imperial and colonial expansionism. By manipulating their historic ill-feeling towards the 'natives', and by helping them to pass measures that turned them into a glorified work force, Rhodes and his Monopolist Party skilfully exploited the fractious relationship between the Boers and blacks to their own advantage and coerced the Bond into giving them a free hand politically. As Schreiner writes in *The Political Situation*, 'Taking advantage of that childlike simplicity which is at once the weakness and the greatest charm of the Boer, he leads him whither he would and also whither he would not'.<sup>435</sup> What concerned Schreiner the most about this 'unnatural marriage' between the Bond and Rhodes was not just the inequalities it would cause between South Africa's black and white races, but the fact that it could end in rupture. Worried about the implications of the Bondsmen discovering that they had entered a union of convenience and would find themselves forsaken by their 'bridegroom' (Rhodes) when they had nothing more to give him, Schreiner reiterates issues that she had raised about interracial relations in 'The Problem of Slavery'. Whereas 'The Problem' dealt with 'half-castism' and the results of sexual miscegenation between European and non-European races, Schreiner makes it clear that Darwin's law of reversion applied to the political intermingling of South Africa's two white races. Given that both races had entered into this union with regressive aims, Schreiner not only implies that they had collectively given birth to retrogressive legislation, but also that they had forced the country to revert back to a more primitive state of being. Arguing that the Bondsmen had effectively prostituted themselves and allowed themselves to be bought, she insists that, as was the case with 'half-castism', the circumstances surrounding a Boer and British 'inter-marriage' would remain anti-

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<sup>433</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 10.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> *The Political Situation*, p. 11.

social, unless it was based on ‘profound self-abnegating love and sympathy’. Whilst Schreiner assesses this kind of union in *An English-South African’s View*, she also considers the causes and consequences of the first major rupture between them: the mistreatment of the Uitlanders (foreign mining population) and the Jameson Raid.

#### *An English-South African’s View of the Situation: The Uitlanders and the Jameson Raid*

As I have explained in the Chapter Overview, Schreiner published *An English-South African’s View* in July 1899, with the intention of outlining the probable devastation caused by, and convincing Britain to turn down their thumbs to, war. Selling 3,500 copies in its first five days, it was reviewed widely and sold well in Britain and abroad. Despite receiving thirty-two notices in a letter from her publisher, her views nonetheless remained unpopular. British journalist and editor of the *Cape Times*, Edmund Garrett, stated that *An English-South African’s View* supported the ‘logic of a schoolgirl with the statistics of a romanticist, and [wrapped] both in the lambent fire of a Hebrew prophetess’.<sup>436</sup> However, it was not only Schreiner’s contemporaries who failed to take her political commentary seriously. As I establish, many modern day critics have deemed Schreiner’s anti-war work as ineffectual, overly emotional- both Schoeman and First and Scott have criticised her desire to appeal to her readers’ hearts rather than their intellects- and as lacking in logic. Whilst this is something that I challenge and redress in this chapter, I also look at the methods that she employed as a means of disparaging the Jameson Raid and analysing the events and tensions that were leading South Africa’s white races to war. These methods included the financial and racial exploitation of the Boers, social Darwinism, the political machinations of Kruger and the British, the ‘grievances’ of the Uitlanders, the growth of Johannesburg and Schreiner’s vision of a unified white South Africa.

Looking firstly at the growth of Johannesburg, where she had lived for several months during 1898, Schreiner reinforces in *An English-South African’s View* that the discovery of vast stores of mineral wealth had led to a large number of foreigners descending on the Transvaal. These foreigners had turned Johannesburg from a mining camp of 3,000 diggers to a city of 100,000 stake-claimers, amalgamators and speculators. Using her position as an English South African to chart the history of this

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<sup>436</sup> Quoted in Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, p. 113.

growth, Schreiner identifies the effect that this had on the Boers, on their relationship with the British and on South Africa's racial, social, financial and political situation. Whilst in the past, all newcomers, such as the 1820 British Settlers, had arrived in 'driblets', had been easily 'digested' into the population, had taken their share in the country's 'passions' and 'social conditions', and had become 'truly and typically South African', Schreiner claims the Uitlanders had caused significant problems for the Transvaal. Made up of men of every 'species'- she avers that, during the course of a day, one would come into contact with Hungarians, Indians and Chinamen- Schreiner makes it clear that the bulk of Johannesburg's miners had only a temporary interest in the country and had no desire to intermingle with or become a 'permanent element' in its population. As a result, their only allegiances were to the pursuit of wealth, and, as I discuss shortly, to sending the money that they had extracted from South Africa's land and peoples back to their homelands. Similarly, as Schreiner states in *An English-South African's View*, the Uitlanders had brought with them to Johannesburg all the unedifying social characteristics and inequalities of a temporary and 'dislocated' European civilisation, such as gambling halls, palaces, crimes of violence, a down-trodden labour force and sexual exploitation. Of the modernity and wickedness that had originated and maintained this 'rag-bag' civilisation, Schreiner contends in a March 1899 letter to politician John X. Merriman that 'We are a city given over to lust. Lust of money in the first place, lust of pleasure, lust of excitement; and the tone of our sexual morality springs [...] from this general attitude'.<sup>437</sup> Depicting this tone and Johannesburg itself as 'growing more [and] more dreadful' in her letters to Merriman and Alice Greene, Schreiner not only expresses her disgust at the absolute abjection of the black diggers, but also condemns the presence of brothels and the ongoing demoralisation of women.<sup>438</sup> Complaining to Merriman that, despite working amongst the 'out-cast women & drunken sailors at the East End', she had never seen anything as 'appalling' and 'decayed', Schreiner struggled to contain her shock that, given the exploitation of her fellow South Africans, the Jameson Raid was motivated by the 'grievances' and mistreatment of the prosperous Uitlanders.<sup>439</sup> As Thomas Pakenham

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<sup>437</sup> Olive Schreiner to John X. Merriman, 17 March 1899, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 47-49. Schreiner's emphasis.

<sup>438</sup> See 'Olive Schreiner to Alice Greene, 12 September 1899, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', line 22; Olive Schreiner to Alice Greene, 31 August 1899, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 12-13.

<sup>439</sup> Olive Schreiner to John X. Merriman, 17 March 1899, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 20-21.

reveals in *The Boer War* (1992), these grievances had revolved around the Transvaal Government's heavy taxation of the gold mining industry, its monopoly over items such as dynamite, its 1888 decision to raise the residence qualification for the franchise from five years to fourteen years, and the high cost of 'native' labour. Whereas the Uitlanders had accused the Transvaal Government and President Kruger of treating them as second-class citizens, of favouring its own miners and of encroaching on their 'social conditions' and 'passions', the Boers themselves were aware that if the franchise had remained as it was they would have lost control of their own Republic. As Pakenham points out, the majority of the sixty thousand Uitlander population had resided in the Transvaal for more than five years, which would have meant that, under the old franchise law, they would have been granted 'political equality' with the Boers and would have collectively controlled the state.<sup>440</sup> Realising that the franchise was 'key to everything', Rhodes and diamond magnate Alfred Beit, hoped to exploit the tensions and racial inequalities that it had caused between the Uitlanders and the Boers, and use it as a means of rousing the former into rising against Kruger and the Transvaal Republic.

Believing that they would revolt and seize the Boer armoury in Pretoria, the plan was for politician Leander Starr Jameson, who had found himself charged with organising the Raid, and his force of Chartered Company mercenaries to enter Johannesburg in order to restore harmony and ultimately take control of the Transvaal and its mineral wealth. Yet, despite mobilising an army of six hundred mercenaries at Pitsani, on the border of the Transvaal, animosity began to grow between the instigators of the Raid (the Reform Committee), who failed to agree on the form of government that should be adopted in the aftermath of the coup. Due to this animosity, the Committee sent Jameson a series of telegrams, warning him that seizing Johannesburg was futile and could potentially 'end in fiasco'. However, instead of heeding these warnings, Jameson acted on his own initiative and convinced his troops, by reading aloud from a supposed letter of invitation, that the Uitlanders had wanted the rising to go ahead and would soon come to their aid. Informing them that there were all the 'elements' necessary for armed conflict and that, without their intervention, "“thousands of unarmed women and children”" would find themselves at the "“mercy of well-armed Boers”", Jameson also played on their insecurities and resentments about British defeats

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<sup>440</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Abacus, 1992), p. 49.

during the 'First Boer War', especially during the battle of Majuba.<sup>441</sup> As Pakenham confirms, 'Majuba was "unfinished business" for the British army, something to wipe off the slate'.<sup>442</sup> Cutting off both the British and the Boer lines of communication, as a way of protecting the identities of the major players behind the Raid and preventing the latter from becoming cognisant of their impending attack on the Transvaal, Jameson and his men sounded their bugle and proceeded to Johannesburg. Yet, four days later, and a couple of hours ride from Johannesburg, it became patently obvious that the Uitlanders had not risen and were not coming to their aid. Discovering that the Uitlanders had instead made their peace with Kruger and his government, Jameson and his men were further deflated by the fact that not one volunteer had ridden out to join them. Finding themselves under relentless attack from the Boer commandos, who had learnt of their plans and were experts at guerrilla warfare, they struggled to overcome their 'invisible enemy' and telegraphed Johannesburg for assistance. Unsurprisingly this assistance did not come and after suffering significant casualties, the Chartered Company forces raised a makeshift white flag, made from the apron of an African servant girl.<sup>443</sup> Rising out of the ground 'like ants', the Boers disarmed the British, helped the wounded and escorted their prisoners, including Jameson, to the gaol in Pretoria. As Frank Welsh observes in *A History of South Africa* (2000), the effects of the Raid were devastating. Not only was Rhodes' involvement clear and the complicity of the British Government suspected, but also the Boers themselves who, despite their dislike for its rule, had a grudging respect for its integrity, were furious and horrified.<sup>444</sup> Although causing similar levels of approbation amongst the British in the Cape, only a minority, including Merriman and Betty Molteno's brother, Percy, publicly spoke out in favour of the Boers. The rest, as Schreiner comments in *An English-South African's View*, assumed an even more fervently jingoistic position. Not only did they channel their energies into backing Rhodes and reviling those that criticised him, but they also formed the South Africa League and condemned those who had refused to rise up as 'poltroons and cowards'.<sup>445</sup> Asserting that, far from being 'poltroons and cowards', these 'brave' men would 'die in the last ditch defending their [home]land', Schreiner makes the point that they simply did not feel themselves bound to 'die in a foreign land for causes which

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<sup>441</sup> Quoted in Pakenham, p. 2.

<sup>442</sup> Pakenham, p. 4.

<sup>443</sup> Pakenham, p. 5.

<sup>444</sup> Frank Welsh, *A History of South Africa* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 317-318.

<sup>445</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 44; see Welsh, p. 318.

they neither knew nor cared for'.<sup>446</sup> Comparing their situation to those visiting France or Italy on health grounds, Schreiner infers that the Uitlanders had no more reason to participate in the Raid than the ill and infirm had to engage themselves in a war between the 'Bonapartists and the Republicans'. Like the latter, who had derived numerous health benefits from their sojourn in foreign climes, the Uitlanders had found themselves incapable of 'running a knife' into a land that had given them a hospitable welcome and bestowed them with great wealth.

Despite praising their reluctance to support the endeavours of Rhodes and the Chartered Company, Schreiner calls attention to the implications of bestowing them with this wealth. As she explores in both *The Political Situation* and *An English-South African's View*, the most significant consequence of this was that South Africa's diamonds and gold were passing out of the hands of its Dutch and black inhabitants. Indeed, not only were the Uitlanders exporting the money that they had extracted from South Africa's soil to their homelands in Britain, France, Russia and America, but also the bulk of its wealth was lining the pockets of a 'very small knot' of speculators and monopolists. Given that the latter had amalgamated this wealth into 'Rings and Trusts', Schreiner entreats her readers to question whether it was 'desirable that society should so organise itself that one man may easily obtain possession of twenty millions, while the bulk of equally intelligent and laborious men obtain little or nothing'.<sup>447</sup> Contrasting this 'problem' with the history of America, where there were many individuals possessing wealth amounting to several millions, Schreiner insists that even if the richest millionaire had tried to corrupt and purchase the whole population for political purposes, they could not be bought. Additionally, as she notes in *An English-South African's View*, America's millionaires were American citizens. Not only did they expend their money in their homeland, but also when they died, they would leave 'munificent donations' to America's colleges and public institutions. Exclaiming, therefore, that America's millionaires and monopolists- and its financial situation in general- had little bearing on the 'problem' of South Africa, which was a young, barren country with no other source of income, Schreiner reveals her dismay at the fact that the latter had prepared no legislative enactments to deal with its discoveries of gold. Slow to wake up to the lesson that the exploitation of their diamonds 'should have taught [them]', Schreiner insinuates that her fellow South Africans were to blame for allowing

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<sup>446</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 44-45.

<sup>447</sup> *An English South-African's View*, p. 49.

the wealth that should have ‘reared and created [their] [...] national institutions’ and made them ‘one of the richest peoples in the world’ to turn them into ‘one of the poorest’.<sup>448</sup> Of its exportation elsewhere, Schreiner states that it was being used to build ‘palaces in Park Lane [and] [...] [fill] the bags of the croupiers at Monte Carlo, and that the country itself was ‘no more’ to the Uitlanders, speculators and capitalists than a ‘field for extracting wealth’.<sup>449</sup> More importantly, these men were employing this wealth as a means of corrupting South Africa’s public life, putting their candidates into Parliament, grasping the reins of power and enslaving its peoples. Even worse, as Schreiner writes in *An English-South African’s View*, they were attempting to encroach on and exploit South Africa’s freedom by dying its soil with the blood of its citizens.

Returning to the issues that were leading South Africa to war, such as the arrival of ‘eighty thousand’ Uitlanders to its shores, Schreiner uses *An English-South African’s View* to attract the sympathy and interest of statesmen and thinkers, of ‘whatever nationality’. Conscious that the former had ‘gone deeply into the problems of social structure and the practical science of government’, and the latter had devoted ‘time and study’ to elucidating ‘social problems and the structure of societies and nations’, Schreiner asks them to consider the problem placed suddenly before South Africa and the Transvaal Republic.<sup>450</sup> Claiming that this problem exceeded the ‘complexity and difficulty’ with which it has been a necessity for the ‘people of any country in the past or present’ to deal with, Schreiner demonstrates this by looking at the historical impact that the appearance of thousands of Chinamen, Polish and Russian Jews had on America and Britain. Whilst their arrival had been deemed as a ‘national calamity’, Schreiner intimates that, in comparison to the Uitlanders flooding into South Africa, these Chinamen and Jews were easily absorbed into the population and had proved themselves to be ‘good and loyal subjects’. Affirming, therefore, that the ‘past experience of humanity’ had not ‘marked out a path’ for the unique position that the Transvaal and South Africa had found itself in, Schreiner investigates the effect that this had had on Johannesburg physically, and the impact that this had had on the Boers politically. Asserting that fifteen years previously, Johannesburg had been a peaceful ‘spot’, where the Boer had tended the sheep and his wife had sat on their doorstep watching the sunset, Schreiner praises the ‘marvellous manner’ in which the Transvaal

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<sup>448</sup> *An English-South African’s View*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>449</sup> *An English-South African’s View*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>450</sup> *An English-South African’s View*, p. 61.



government had risen to meet the 'difficulties' of their new racial and 'social conditions'. One of these difficulties was, as Schreiner notes, the enfranchisement of the Uitlanders. As we have seen, this issue had caused major problems between the British and the Boers, and had been employed as a means of provoking war. Contending that she was a 'fanatic of the franchise', and believed that the state was healthiest and strongest when every adult citizen, irrespective of sex and race, was given the right to vote, Schreiner makes it apparent that she did not feel that this should be extended to the Uitlanders. Unlike South Africa's permanent inhabitants, who had taken an equal share in and were heavily invested in its health and future, she reiterates that the Uitlanders, who had no past history in the country, had only a temporary, commercial interest in its present. Alleging that it was impractical and 'suicidal' to give such men the franchise, she rescues America's history of dealing with such difficulties. Having instituted a probationary residence of two years and having requested that newcomers took an oath officially renouncing their allegiance to any foreign sovereign or land, before they could become enfranchised, Schreiner suggests that America had 'struck' upon a wise 'solution'. Whilst feeling that this should be implemented in South Africa, Schreiner makes the point that, whereas the newly enfranchised burgher in America received a one-sixteenth millionth share in the governmental control of the State, the Transvaal burgher received over eight hundred times that power. Thus, as she identifies in *An English-South African's View*, it is perhaps unsurprising that Kruger and the Transvaal government wanted to be certain of the loyalty and sincerity of its citizens- and of the Uitlanders- before they enfranchised them. Although not alluding directly to the ill-feeling that had been engendered by the Transvaal government's decision to raise the franchise, Schreiner attempts to explain and arouse sympathy for Kruger's position on this matter. Clearly of the opinion that Kruger had done his best to accommodate the Uitlanders, and had dealt with them in a 'wide spirit of humanity and justice', Schreiner appeals to all statesmen and thinkers to recognise this and to help extinguish the increasing tensions between South Africa's two white races.

Hopeful that these men would sympathise with the Transvaal's need for true and loyal citizens, Schreiner contrasts the temporary status of the Uitlanders with those who were determined to become an integral part of the State, had an intense affection for its people and institutions and wanted to live and die in South Africa. Convinced that these citizens should be welcomed with 'open arms', she examines the potential ramifications of them mixing their 'seed' with 'ours'. Insinuating that the mixing of this seed could

be both sexual and political, she claims that, at the same time as the monopolists were exploiting the divides blighting interracial relations between the Boers and the Uitlanders, its permanent residents were intermingling and 'building up' the great South African nation of the future. As she maintains in *An English-South African's View*, this nation would be made up of a great mixture of races and would have 'its foundation laid on stones from many lands'.<sup>451</sup> Based on 'profound self-abnegating affection and sympathy', emotions which were almost entirely absent in the exploitative racial and sexual relationships between the whites and the blacks, and between the Afrikaner Bond and Rhodes, Schreiner looks at how war would undermine the ongoing and positive melding of South Africa's various races. Whilst aware that the 'dark races'- like the 'Malays', Indians, 'Coolies', 'Bantus' and 'Hottentots'- would ultimately form the South African nation of the future, Schreiner's greatest concern in *An English-South African's View* was the blending of its 'two great white races'. Of this blending, she writes, 'Love, not figuratively but literally, is obliterating the line of distinction; month by month, week by week [...] men and women of the two races are meeting'.<sup>452</sup> Although, as I explore later, she rescues these 'meetings' in order to combat the rumours of and supposed reasons behind the war, such as the Boers' disloyalty to and mistreatment of Britain and its subjects, Schreiner remained convinced that war would potentially 'obliterate' this love. She was also conscious that it would destroy the fragile links between English South Africans and their motherland. Finding themselves caught between the British and the Boers, and the 'homeland of [their] fathers and the love-land of [their] birth', Schreiner states that the issues impacting upon these groups and forcing her fellow English South Africans to stand mid-way between them had arisen as a result of their inability to understand each other. Thus, as she concludes in *An English-South African's View*, their affectionate history with both countries, and two-fold positions as English South Africans, had fitted them to fulfil specific 'functions': as mediators and interpreters between the two races. Stipulating that these functions were essential at the 'present moment', Schreiner avers that she had felt it incumbent upon her not to maintain her silence nor shrink away from acting at a time when the 'air of South Africa was heavy with [the] rumours of War'.<sup>453</sup> Highlighting the alarm caused by the increasing presence of armed and hired foreign soldiers, I

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<sup>451</sup> *An English-South African's View*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>452</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 29.

<sup>453</sup> *An English-South African's View*, pp. 74-75.

examine her attempts to mediate between Britain and South Africa, and consider her reaction to the ‘rumours of War’.

*An English-South African’s View and Schreiner’s Response to the ‘Rumours of War’*

Depicting this skirmish as a struggle between ‘white men and white’ and between a mother and daughter, who were threatening to rise up in a ‘horrible embrace’ and rend each other’s ‘vitals’, I explore the ways in which Schreiner employed her ‘pen, & tongue’ to try and ‘fight’ the growing rumours of war. Not only does she revisit the idea of South Africa as a great, blended white nation- in order to illustrate that there was peace between the two races in the years preceding the South African War- but she also identifies ‘how and why’ neither the British nor the Dutch-born South Africans would benefit from this conflict. Looking at who would gain by it, Schreiner shares her disquiet about the scale and costs of war, and rescues historic battles and uses prevalent social Darwinist ideas to contradict the popular view that the Boers would be a simple foe to defeat. Insisting that might did not always conquer the weak, she similarly rejects Victorian paternalism, and the conventional nineteenth-century image of Britain as a benevolent father, in favour of Victorian maternalism. Scrutinising Schreiner’s reliance on maternal imagery, and her depictions of Britain as a mother, I consider both Schoeman and First and Scott’s assertions that *An English-South African’s View* was overly womanly and appealed too strongly to the emotions of her readers. I also weigh up Schoeman’s allegations that, regardless of the ‘changes [that] her thought and belief had undergone over the past twenty years, [...] England was obviously still the ideal to her, and anglicisation the solution to the country’s problems’.<sup>454</sup> Drawing on an interview that she had given to British economist and social theorist, J. A. Hobson, as evidence of this, Schoeman points up Schreiner’s claims that, on Boer farms and in Dutch cottages, the younger generation could be found learning “‘English ways’” and trying to be “‘as English as possible’”.<sup>455</sup> Undoubtedly continuing this theme in *An English-South African’s View*, Schreiner turns her focus from the up-country, pastoral Boers to their more cosmopolitan ‘children’, who not only used English as ‘their daily form of speech’, wore British fashions, and had a deep affection for Britain and its

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<sup>454</sup> Karel Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here: Olive Schreiner and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>455</sup> Quoted in Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here*, p. 49.

institutions, but were also among the country's most noted judges, lawyers and physicians. Whilst contending that the Boers 'long repose' from the 'fretful [and overtaxing] stir of great cities' had allowed their descendants to enter back into the 'world of occupations with more than the ordinary grasp of power', Schreiner makes it apparent that they owed their intellectual achievements to Britain, and to a British education.<sup>456</sup> By intimating that their achievements and 'English friendships' were binding Britain as close to their hearts 'as to ours who are English born', Schreiner highlights the fact that it was the 'cultured and polished' Dutch-descended South Africans, rather than the Boers themselves, who were mingling with the British and forming the South African nation of the future. In addition, by suggesting that this blended nation would regard 'England' as their intellectual home, speak the 'English tongue' and have no desire to see any other European race installed in its place, Schreiner seemingly treats Britain 'as the ideal' and adheres to the social Darwinist view of the British as the supreme white power. Recalling the standpoint of a well-known but unnamed Dutch South African, who had felt like a 'stranger' until he had landed on British shores, Schreiner alludes to his 'heart-soreness' over the Jameson Raid, and divulges her motivations for positing the political and sexual blending of the two races in social Darwinist terms. Conscious that Britain regarded the Boers in much the same way as she herself had done in *African Farm*- as illiterate, dirty peasants, who had degenerated racially as a result of their close proximity to the blacks- Schreiner knew that she had to find a means of penetrating this jingoism and painting the Dutch in a more palatable light.

Aware of the unpopularity of and controversy surrounding her previous attempts at overturning British prejudices against the Boers, and at mediating between the two races, Schreiner admits in an 1896 letter to her close friend, Mary Sauer, that her articles on the Boers had provoked outrage amongst both the English and the Dutch South Africans. Fully expecting the English newspapers to attack her articles, and infer that she was playing into the hands of the Dutchmen, she professes to Sauer that the condemnation of the Dutch paper, *Ons Land*, had left her 'quite dizzy with surprise'.<sup>457</sup> Adding that she felt 'just like a man who goes to help another man whom he feels is being unjustly treated & the man he is helping jumps up and gives him a blow between

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<sup>456</sup> See *An English South-African's View*, p. 28; *Thoughts*, p. 194.

<sup>457</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Mary Sauer nee Cloete, 25 April 1896, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', line 17.

the eyes', Schreiner was cognisant of the fact that *An English-South African's View* had to appeal to and appease both her British and her Dutch readership.<sup>458</sup> Combining her praise of Boer nationalism with the growth of the erudite Dutch-descended South Africans, and her criticisms of Empire with the anglicisation of the future South African nation, Schreiner evidently tries to include something that would appeal to all of her readers. In addition, recognising that, on the eve of war, she could not risk alienating her audience, Schreiner uses her 'two-fold' role as an English South African and her position as 'half-lover and half-outsider', to promote a line of reasoning that undermined the demand for war. As she makes clear, this line of reasoning revolved around the eventual, and complete, fusion of the British and the Dutch. She writes: 'in another generation the fusion will be complete. There will be no Dutchmen [...] and no Englishmen in South Africa'.<sup>459</sup> Before identifying 'how and why' Schreiner believed that this 'fusion' would offset the desire for war, I explore the means by which she manipulates social Darwinist ideas in order to make this ongoing blend of Dutch and English South Africans acceptable and minimally offensive to her predominantly British readers. By the time Schreiner published *An English-South African's View*, she had become well aware that her previous writings had failed to elicit much sympathy for the Boers and their customs, passions and social conditions. Teaching her, in the words of Krebs, that the way to appeal to the 'better instincts of the English' and counteract claims of Dutch disloyalty was 'not to parade the [Boers'] seventeenth-century Calvinism', Schreiner was mindful that the latter would be far more receptive to interracial relations with and a nation comprised of anglicised Dutch South Africans.<sup>460</sup> Claiming that they were in 'no way distinguishable from the rest of the nineteenth-century Europeans', Schreiner takes this one step further by insinuating that both the African Taal and the Boers themselves were passing rapidly away and being displaced by their more advanced and civilised children.<sup>461</sup> Not only does this displacement support the popular evolutionary notion that advanced nations would sweep away and civilise inferior ones, but also suggests that Schreiner regarded the Boers as a lower race.

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<sup>458</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Mary Sauer nee Cloete, 25 April 1896, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 15-17.

<sup>459</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 30.

<sup>460</sup> Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, p. 121.

<sup>461</sup> *An English-South African's View*, pp. 28-29.

Thus, in doing so- and in spite of her reluctance to offend her audience- it is difficult to ignore the fact that Schreiner's thinking on the Boers appeared to have undergone a complete volte face and seemingly undermined the anti-Darwinian stance that she had taken in *Thoughts*, *Trooper Peter* and *The Political Situation*. As Krebs remarks, 'Schreiner's prediction [...] [that] the Englishman would dominate the primitive Boer elements in the South African of the future [...] would have seemed a sad [...] vision to the author of "The Boer"''.<sup>462</sup> As we have seen in previous chapters, not only had Schreiner treated the Taal as a wall that was protecting the Boers from the 'dissolutions' and 'decays' of the nineteenth century but also, in 'The Psychology of the Boer', she actively encouraged South Africa's 'Ooms' and 'Tantes' to hold fast to their 'primitive' faiths and customs. Seeing the Boers as the 'backbone' of South Africa, she states that her 'fear' was not that they would 'exhibit any incapacity for accepting nineteenth-century ideals, but that [they] may swallow them too readily'.<sup>463</sup> Ostensibly illustrating the shift that had occurred in Schreiner's attitudes towards the Dutch and their acceptance of nineteenth-century ideals, it is important to note that, whilst inferring in *An English-South African's View* that Britain would play a key role in shaping the 'South African of the future', she simultaneously emphasised the Boers' large contribution to this new race. Indeed, although she regarded the British as the moral, social and intellectual 'backbone' of this new race, Schreiner suggests that the Boers' virility and long repose from the 'heated life' of the nineteenth century had brought it into existence and made it possible. In addition to subtly accentuating their importance to South Africa and their relevance to its future, her return to the social Darwinian thinking present in her earlier works can also be explained by drawing attention to the environment that she was writing in and the level of feeling that she was working against.

Whereas in the years following the Jameson Raid, relations between the British and the Boers had improved, due to the prosecutions of the conspirators and the election of a markedly liberal administration, headed by Schreiner's brother, Will, she could not shake the feeling that war was imminent. As she notes in a January 1899 letter to Will, 'I have had for the last three or four months exactly the feeling I had before the raid [...] If I analyse the feeling I find Rhodes' character is the ground of my certainty. To right

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<sup>462</sup> Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, p. 121.

<sup>463</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 239.

himself now he must plunge South Africa [into] war'.<sup>464</sup> Although scathing of her lack of achievements during the War, Cronwright does concede, in *Life*, that Schreiner understood South Africa's political situation and the potential for war in a way that no one else had.<sup>465</sup> Indeed, at the same time as the Boers were regarding the Raid as a moral and psychological triumph and the Cape Parliament were working hard to keep the peace in the colony, Rhodes and Chamberlain, amongst others, were using the continuing tensions surrounding the mistreatment of the Uitlanders to 'plunge South Africa into war'. Whilst Schreiner had spent years warning politicians and friends alike about the machinations and determination of these men to provoke war, she also had to contend with the growing anti-Boer feeling in Britain and within South Africa itself. Bolstered by pro-British publications, such as the *South African Review* and the *Owl* (*Penstone's Weekly*), and characterised by frequent outbreaks of unparalleled patriotism and violence, not only did the newspapers satirise Schreiner's political efforts and label her as a hysteric, but they also accused her of receiving £4,000 from the Transvaal Government for writing *Trooper Peter*. Devastated by the idea that her countrymen believed that she would set pen to paper and 'prostitute' herself by 'writing to order', Schreiner made it clear, in a January 1899 letter to Jan Smuts, that these accusations were 'worse even than murder' and would 'injur[e] the usefulness' of anything she might write in the future.<sup>466</sup> Although it is impossible to ascertain whether these accusations had 'injured the usefulness' of *An English-South African's View*, the level of jingoism and vitriol levelled against Schreiner was illustrated by the fact that, during a trip to Edinburgh to raise awareness of the 'wickedness' of the war, Cronwright was nearly killed by an Imperialist mob. Additionally, as she discloses in a 1900 letter to Betty Molteno, she herself had been at the receiving end of the 'most fearful insulting & threatening letters'.<sup>467</sup> Thus, given the climate that she was writing in and the attacks, both satirical and physical, on other pro-Boers, such as Merriman, who had found himself pursued down the street by an angry mob, it is perhaps unsurprising that *An English-South African's View* appears the least divisive of her political works and seems the most emotive.

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<sup>464</sup> Olive Schreiner to William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, 8 January 1899, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 28-32.

<sup>465</sup> *Life*, p. 311.

<sup>466</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Jan Smuts, 23 January 1899, National Archives Repository, Pretoria, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 20-27.

<sup>467</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Betty Molteno, 17 June 1900, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 30-31.

However, despite appearing less controversial than *Trooper Peter* and ‘The Problem of Slavery’, *An English-South African’s View* remains overtly critical of British imperialism and Britain’s attempts to appropriate violently the Transvaal. Indeed, whilst endorsing the idea of a unified British South Africa, I believe that Schreiner uses this unification solely as a means of negating the need for and enticing her readers into ‘turning their thumbs down’ to war. Not only is this sustained by her redemption of the history of British rule in South Africa and her critique of the rapid industrialisation of Johannesburg, but it is also reinforced by her determination to use her two-fold position as an English South African to appeal to the self-interest and conscience of the ‘Great British public’. As we have seen, by focusing on the fusion of English and Dutch South Africans, Schreiner tries to prevent war by drawing Britain’s attention to the intellectual, educational and vocational similarities between the two races. As she notes in *An English-South African’s View*: ‘The present State Attorney of the Transvaal is a man who has taken some of the highest honours Cambridge can bestow’.<sup>468</sup> In addition to calling attention to these similarities, and being aware that miscegenation between the British and the Boers was unpalatable to her readers, she knew that, by treating the Dutch South Africans as indistinguishable from other Europeans, she could depict them as a superior, rather than an inferior, race. Conscious that this would appeal to the British public, due to the fact that it suggested that ‘interbreeding between men of [superior] European blood cause[d] no deterioration, or [was] of marked benefit’, she was also aware that it would awaken their consciences to the probable slaughter of men, women and children of similar blood and with close links to Britain.<sup>469</sup> Aside from alerting her readers to the potential death of a fellow superior, European race, Schreiner wanted to make them attentive to the likelihood that a great many British soldiers ‘might fall’. Whilst numerous military and political experts had predicted that twenty thousand soldiers would crush the Boer republics in a matter of months and that the war would be over by Christmas 1899, Schreiner remained convinced that Britain’s pacification of South Africa would take a ‘hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand imported soldiers’ and several years. In spite of her prophecies being dismissed as unduly pessimistic- the war was actually more devastating than she had predicted- Schreiner rescues the history of European imperialism to point up the costs involved in violently pacifying the Transvaal,

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<sup>468</sup> *An English-South African’s View*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>469</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 120.



particularly in light of the fact that the British were assimilating the Dutch population naturally and without coercion. Thus, not only does Schreiner use this 'natural' assimilation of the two races as a means of advising Britain against rushing and forcing this process, but also explores the impact that war would have on the then peaceable relationship between the British and the Dutch, and between the English South Africans and their motherland. Believing that both relationships would be imperilled by the war, she casts Britain in the role of the 'Angel of Death' and examines who would gain from a 'great young nation' being torn and rent by its mother.

Looking firstly at Britain's role as the 'Angel of Death', Schreiner employs her position as an English South African to identify what would happen to the anglicisation of South Africa and to the country's deeply intertwined white racial groups if the other was killed off. Arguing that not a day, week or hour passed without an English South African woman giving birth to a Dutchman's child, Schreiner decrees that if the 'Angel of Death should spread his wings across the land and strike dead in one night every man [...] woman and child of [one race]', South Africa would be plunged into mourning.<sup>470</sup> Insisting that every heart and household would be prostrate with grief and would be mourning the loss of their kindred, friends, childhood companions and the souls who had loved them and whom they had loved, Schreiner infers that, by destroying every man, woman and child of one race, the 'Angel of Death' (Britain) would have alienated the other. Indeed, as Schreiner asserts in her later article, 'The South African Nation' (1900), by declaring war on the Boers and attempting to force a union between the British and the Dutch, Britain not only risked permanently alienating both races, but would also literally and metaphorically ensure that this fusion would 'never bloom on her bosom'. Comparing the natural and unnatural fusion of these races to a gardener growing 'roses', Schreiner alleges that, 'A flower pushed artificially open by coarse fingers always has something ragged in its appearance; its bloom is never so fair and harmonious as one that has opened spontaneously under the influence of sun and air'.<sup>471</sup> Averring that, like the 'sun and air', time and love were spontaneously healing the antagonisms and inequalities caused by events such as Slagter's Nek and the Jameson Raid, Schreiner makes it apparent that the relationship between the Dutch and English-born South Africans had become too 'fair and harmonious' to necessitate or maintain the need for war. Thus given that there was no 'growing hatred' marring their

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<sup>470</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 77.

<sup>471</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 348.

relationship, Schreiner entreats her readers to take a long, hard look at South Africa's political situation and ascertain what sudden crime, reckless slaughter or terrible racial difference had made it imperative for the 'coarse fingers' of the mother to 'push' a sword into the heart of her daughter.

Struggling to understand why the problems between the two countries had become so 'mighty' that they could not be solved by 'means of peace', Schreiner examines, in detail, those groups, countries and individuals who believed that they would gain from a war between the British and Boers. Alluding to the same groups, countries and individuals as she had in *Trooper Peter*, Schreiner uses her position as 'half-lover' and 'half-outsider' to make the point that, regardless of what benefits they thought they might gain from it, and in spite of what the British newspapers and anti-Boer propagandists had to say, war would only result in tragic loss. Turning firstly to Britain and South Africa, Schreiner argues that whilst propagandists had sought to convince the British that a war would right the wrongs of the Uitlanders, rid the country of race hatreds, and prevent the Dutch from usurping their possessions, she insisted that it would rupture cables of fellowship, violate treaties and undermine great historical traditions. As she points out in 'The Boer and his Republics', these traditions and treaties centred upon the legal assurances that Britain had made in the Sand River, Pretoria and London conventions, which stipulated that it would actively cease to seek control of or interfere in the internal governance of the Transvaal. Additionally, although the pro-British press had made much of the black 'natives'' desire to be free from Boer rule, and of Kruger's reluctance to agree to a five-year franchise and avoid war, Schreiner insists that South Africa as a whole had no desire to be torn and rent by its sovereign mother.<sup>472</sup> Alluding not only to Britain, but also to the maternal duties of Queen Victoria herself, Schreiner makes it apparent that this 'great woman of eighty' had no intention of tarnishing her long and pure reign by agreeing to use her 'mother's hand' to strike down her South African children. Similarly, convinced that the average British soldier would gather no 'laurels' from striking down simple farmers, old men and young lads, Schreiner alleges that the slaughter of the Boers would simultaneously strengthen her fellow South Africans' resolve against war, particularly those whose 'hearts' were 'knit' to Britain. As she asserts in *An English-South African's View*: 'Each hired soldier's bullet that strikes down a South African does more; it finds a billet

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<sup>472</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 79.

here in our hearts [...] [and] kills that which will never live again'.<sup>473</sup> Before looking at the ways in which war 'finds a billet' in the hearts of English South Africans and 'kills' the 'cables of fellowship' between themselves and their motherland, I establish Schreiner's motives for calling attention to each of these individuals, groups and countries. Having ascertained that none of these men, women or countries would benefit from or had any real longing for war, Schreiner uses them to challenge anti-Boer propaganda and to suggest that there was only one group who would gain from conflict between the British and the Boers: the capitalists and speculators. Alluding to them as 'misty figures', who were passing paper money from hand to hand, and whose only motivation was gold, Schreiner intimates that they were solely responsible for spreading rumours of, and goading the 'greatest empire on earth' to, war. Despite coming to a conclusion that has been reiterated by several historians- that the conflict between the British and the Boers was motivated by gold- her logic has been described as 'lacking' and appears to focus on the emotional rather than the physical costs of war.<sup>474</sup> Indeed, not only did Schreiner ostensibly misconstrue the level of support for the war- for example, Queen Victoria had given much of her time to promoting the need for teaching the Boers a 'lesson'- but she also seems to have idealised Britain's feelings towards and responses to the conflict in South Africa. However, rather than idealising Britain and misinterpreting the level of support for the war, I believe that Schreiner's definitive statements about who would gain from it were written with the intention of reminding her British audience about their historical promises and obligations to South Africa and its inhabitants. By positing these in sentimental terms, and by identifying the grief that would be caused by the British 'Angels of Death' striking down the entire Boer race, Schreiner clearly hoped to appeal to the emotions and integrity of her readers and counteract the racial frenzy that was being engendered by the rumours of war. This is similarly apparent in her third response to the rumours of war: her thoughts on the probable outcome of this conflict.

As she points out in *An English-South African's View*, regardless of who had goaded the 'greatest empire on earth' to war, Britain had the ships, soldiers and money to rise up in its full majesty and crush the '30,000' Boers. Whilst highlighting the theoretical ease with which the British could 'crush' the Boers, Schreiner not only wanted to make her readers aware of the fact that this battle would amount to a

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<sup>473</sup> *An English-South African's View*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>474</sup> Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here*, p. 46.

slaughter rather than a victory, but also that it would not be the 'walk over' that the military experts and newspapers imagined it to be. Making it clear that the British would obtain no glory from this battle, Schreiner rescues history and manipulates social Darwinist ideas to illustrate the certain 'something' that made nations immortal and their success the 'property of all human hearts'. Suggesting that this 'something' was displayed by the three hundred at Thermopylae, and during the battles between the Swiss and Austrians and between William the Silent and Spain, Schreiner insists that the hour of their 'external success' was often the hour of 'irrevocable failure', and that the 'hour of [their] death' was often the 'hour of immortality'.<sup>475</sup> Redeeming the history of William the Silent's defeat of the Spaniards as the prime example of this, she asserts that his most notable success was not when he 'hurled backward the greatest empire in the world to meet its slow, imperial death', but when his little band of Dutchmen stood alone facing death and despair. Although conscious that Britain had not much to fear from a war with a 'little band of Dutchmen', and could sweep them away by 'mere numbers', Schreiner employs William's annihilation of the Spanish in order to remind her audience that the 'greatest empires' could be defeated and to challenge social Darwinist theories that the muscularly strong always conquered the weak. Furthering this argument by drawing on an analogy from nature, she recollects watching a meerkat being attacked by a mastiff. Recalling that the meerkat barely reached the first joint of the mastiff's leg, Schreiner alleges that there seemed no chance of escape when the former became immersed in the jaws of the latter. However, by fastening its teeth inside its captor's throat, and forcing the muscularly strong mastiff to release it from its mouth, the mauled and wounded meerkat ultimately succeeded in creeping back to its hole in the red African earth. Whilst of the opinion that the Boers might prove themselves to be like South Africa's meerkats and emerge wounded and mauled from the jaws of defeat, Schreiner felt that, given Britain's capacity for importing more soldiers, it was more likely that its mastiffs would pacify them with the mouths of their guns. As a result, Schreiner believed that Britain's 'pacification' of the Boer Republics would be akin to their 1677 pacification of West Virginia and to Oliver Cromwell's pacification of Ireland. Although Britain's hired soldiers had quickly silenced Virginia's handful of rebels, most of whom were hanged, and had seemingly kept the peace in Ireland for over three centuries, Schreiner rescues the history of these

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<sup>475</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 82.

pacifications to demonstrate what she felt would happen if the British succeeded in subduing the Boers. Inferring that not only was Britain still in the process of pacifying Ireland, but also that a few generations after Virginia was subdued, George Washington (1732-1799), the figurehead of American independence, was born, Schreiner makes it evident that, whilst there might be silence in South Africa, there would never be peace. Indeed, despite British soldiers having the potential to destroy all the fighting men and keep the remaining Boer people down, Schreiner was convinced that as was the case with America under the leadership of Washington, the Boer Republics would ultimately gain their independence. Convinced that it was South Africa's women that would make this possible, she writes that if 'there were left but five thousand pregnant South African born women [...] [they] would breed up again a race like to the first'.<sup>476</sup> Whilst, again, pointing up the role of South African women in saving and safeguarding the future of their race, and in undoing the damage wrought by Rhodes and his fellow capitalists, Schreiner intimates that women, in general, were crucial to preventing the war. This is something that she examines further in her fourth response to the rumours of war: the plight of the English South Africans. However, before looking at women's role in preventing war, it is important to note that, by raising awareness of the plight of the English South Africans, Schreiner was endeavouring to make her readers aware that 'of all the sins' Britain was committing, by declaring war on the Boers, the greatest was towards its own people.

Indeed, not only would Britain kill their faith in and connection to their motherland, but it would also destroy their dream of Empire as a great Banyan tree, in which the 'fowl of heaven' could take 'refuge', and under which 'the beast of the field' could rest. Forcing them to exchange this dream for the nightmare vision of the upas tree, which spelt 'death to those who have lain down in peace under its shadow', Schreiner insists that Britain's campaign against the Boers would poison the social, intellectual, familial and racial roots that kept the English South Africans firmly attached to their motherland. Similarly spelling death to their identity as Britons, and to their position as full-lovers of England, Schreiner, who had been through this process during her sojourn in Europe, makes it apparent that war would awaken the English South Africans to their love and loyalty for South Africa and its peoples. As she notes in *An English-South African's View*, 'each bullet' that British troops send to heart of a

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<sup>476</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 87.

Boer, 'wakes up another who did not know [that] he was [a] [South] African'.<sup>477</sup> By firing these bullets and by awakening them to the other half of their two-fold racial identity, Schreiner claims that the British would ensure that the English South Africans would rather place their hand in a fire, until nothing was left of it but charred and blackened bone, than 'strike down one [fellow] South African man fighting for freedom'.<sup>478</sup> Following this image with the most 'graphic' fight for freedom in the 'history of the world'- that of a browbeaten Benjamin Franklin standing before the Lords of the Council- Schreiner rescues the history of his attempts to save America for Britain, to remind her audience of the consequences of antagonising and alienating hundreds of its own people. As Schreiner points out: 'England recognises now that it was [Franklin] who tried to save an empire for her, and that the men who flouted and browbeat him' and 'hurled' his words back at him 'lost it'.<sup>479</sup> Although not making an explicit connection between herself and Franklin, there are parallels between his actions and Schreiner's aims in *An English-South African's View*. Having herself been metaphorically flouted by her critics, and having had her words hurled back at her 'as lies', it could be argued that Schreiner employs his history as a means of drawing attention to the fact that she, like Franklin, was trying to save an empire for Britain. Indeed, concerned that if her advice went unheeded, as it had in *Trooper Peter*, Britain would jeopardise the ongoing anglicisation of South Africa and allow Rhodes and his capitalists to lose an empire for them, Schreiner hoped that by reiterating America's fate, she would provoke the British public into preventing history from repeating itself. As she recalls, Britain had 'beaten down' the Americans to the extent that they had 'let go [of] the mother ship and [had] drifted away on their own great imperial course across the seas of time'.<sup>480</sup> Cognisant that, in the event of war, the 'beaten down' Dutch and English South Africans would do much the same thing, Schreiner investigates the ways in which it could keep South Africa 'moored to its mother's side'. As she reveals, Schreiner believed that, in order to do so, the British not only had to turn down their thumbs to war at the right moment, but they also needed a man who would sustain 'English' honour and wisdom in South Africa.

Whilst conceding that there had been men in South Africa who had sustained 'English' honour and wisdom, such as George Grey, Schreiner suggests that what the

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<sup>477</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 90.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 91.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

country really required was a new type of Englishman, who possessed maternal rather than paternal 'qualities'. As she writes in *An English-South African's View*, the 'man of whom South Africa has need to-day [...] is a man who must possess more than the knowledge and wisdom of the intellect'.<sup>481</sup> Comparing South Africa to a 'strange household', where 'children and step-children are blended', Schreiner infers that, whilst it was 'easy' for a woman to preside over a home with 'none but the children of her own body in it', it was far more difficult for her to rule over those who were not.<sup>482</sup> Insinuating that it was similarly difficult for the British to rule over those who were not of the same 'body', and did not uphold or share the same customs and traditions, Schreiner beseeches the 'new Englishman' to regard his step-children (the Dutch South Africans) with sympathy and comprehension. Although the latter was an issue that Schreiner had raised several times- in *An English-South African's View* and in her other political works- this is the first time that she couches these 'large and rare qualities' in explicitly feminine terms. Proclaiming that these qualities sprang more from the heart (emotions) than the head (intellect), Schreiner argues that the only way the 'new Englishman' could resolve Britain's racial tensions with the Boers, and reign over South Africa's blended 'household' successfully was to subvert traditional gender roles.

By depicting sympathy and comprehension as female traits, and by treating this 'strange household' as the woman's domain, it would appear that Schreiner is subscribing to biologically determinist ideas on sex. However, I believe that a Darwinian reading of these passages takes them out of their 'argumentative context' and misinterprets the points that Schreiner was trying to make. As was the case with her expositions on race, she was replicating conventional ideas in order to draw in and placate her readers whilst simultaneously originating and maintaining new avenues of thought. As Stanley avers in *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, Schreiner 'thought that both women and men could, and in men's case should, be 'mothers' in the social sense'.<sup>483</sup> Of the opinion, in *An English-South African's View*, that Britain's superior and coercive paternalistic approach to South Africa and its peoples had merely inflamed existing political and racial problems and was pushing the country on to war, Schreiner felt that it was vital for the 'new Englishman' to become a mother in both the 'social [and political] sense'. In doing so, Schreiner was convinced that he would win

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<sup>481</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 93.

<sup>482</sup> *An English-South African's View*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>483</sup> Liz Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman: Olive Schreiner's Social Theory* (Durham: Sociology Press, 2002), p. 152.

the love and loyalty of his step-children, ultimately 'save an empire for England' and heal the country's racial 'wounds'. Of the former, Schreiner hoped that by having to originate and maintain this love and loyalty, and by taking an equal share in the mothering of South Africa's 'strange household', the 'new Englishman' would be forced to look at it in a different light and would recognise that there was much in it of 'vast [...] good and beauty'. Claiming that both the paternalistic and 'bird's-eye' approach failed to recognise the 'good and beauty' in South Africa's black and white step-children, and treated them as equally inferior, Schreiner insists that the 'new Englishman' would see the Dutch through the eyes of a mother and that his response to his 'household' would spring from the heart rather than the intellect. As a result, she was not only certain that he would come to sympathise with the Boers and acknowledge the similarities between their cosmopolitan offspring and the children of his own blood, but also that he would come to comprehend the plight and 'two-fold' loyalties and affections of the English South Africans. Finding himself in a position akin to that of the English South Africans- in his role as 'mother', he would have to care for, understand and mediate between the two races- Schreiner asserts that he could not remain oblivious to the fact that none of his household desired or would benefit from war. Although not mentioning him by name, Schreiner avows that there was 'one figure [...] new to the circle of our existence' who would fulfil this role, act on South Africa's opposition to war and be aware that prematurely forcing the fusion between the two races 'would be to no avail'.<sup>484</sup> Conscious that this 'strange household' was not only 'blended' in the sense that it was comprised of different races, but also that the British and the Dutch were blending naturally of their own accord, Schreiner was confident that the 'new Englishman' would guide the country to its more egalitarian future as the great South African nation.

Whereas her inference that this future would only come to fruition with an 'Englishman' at its helm seems to support Schoeman's assertion that Britain was 'still the ideal to her', I believe that Schreiner was mindful that her audience would not accept any other 'solution to the country's problems'. Similarly, despite maintaining that this 'new Englishman' was a man of honour, loyalty, charm and knowledge, and would not 'violate a promise or strike in the dark', Schreiner suggests in *An English-South African's View* that his role as social and political 'mother' would go against

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<sup>484</sup> *An English-South African's View*, p. 93. I believe that she is referring to Milner here.



nature and would need to be encouraged.<sup>485</sup> What is particularly interesting about this, is not only does she imply, in her political works and letters, that it was women, like herself, who would do this encouraging, but also that they would make a vital contribution to the events leading up to and surrounding the war itself. Of the former, given that Schreiner was writing at a time when women had no agency or formal presence in South African affairs, much has been made of her ‘deluded’ and ‘overinflated’ belief that she could influence key political players, like Alfred Milner, and effect change. As we have seen in Chapter One, Cronwright went to great lengths in *Life* and *Letters* to denigrate his wife’s political achievements and highlight their ineffectiveness. Having allowed a veil to fall over these achievements, and given his readers the impression that Schreiner had been inactive and written few letters during this period, Cronwright’s interpretation of her has led critics and biographers to conclude that she had accomplished little throughout the 1890s and exaggerated the sway that she had over South African politics.<sup>486</sup> With reference to the Olive Schreiner Letters Project, this is something that I redress in the next section. Of the latter, as she affirms in her political texts, it was not just men who could and should transcend traditional gender roles and exploit what she saw as the ‘plasticity of biology’ in times of war and strife.<sup>487</sup> As is apparent in her recollection of Boer history and in her responses to the rumours of war, Schreiner believed that women could be war-like and were the key to: originating and maintaining racial rebellion, saving and securing the future of their race, and finding a solution to South Africa’s racial problems. These are themes that Schreiner continues in in her letters, articles and speeches and in her posthumous allegory ‘Eighteen-Ninety-Nine’.

#### From Rumours to War: Schreiner, the South African War and the Role of Women

Looking firstly at her portrayal of these themes in ‘Eighteen-Ninety-Nine’, I examine the way in which her female protagonists not only transcend their gender roles and prove themselves to be the life-blood of their race, but also illustrate the level of equality and freedom that women could attain to during times of conflict and war. Redeeming the history of this conflict from the perspective of an older Boer woman,

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<sup>485</sup> *An English-South African’s View*, p. 93.

<sup>486</sup> Schoeman, *Only an Anguish to Live Here*, p. 14.

<sup>487</sup> Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman*, p. 153.

whose life spanned many of the events that were central to the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism- such as the Great Trek and the massacre at Weenan- Schreiner again explores the sexual and racial costs of colonial expansionism, capitalism, imperialism and British rule. Whilst having already discussed this history and the general costs of the latter in 'The Boer and his Republics' and in *An English-South African's View*, in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', Schreiner scrutinises the impact that they were having on an individual Boer woman and her family, and on their simple pastoral lifestyle. Setting the majority of her allegory on a small farm in the Northern Transvaal, it tells the story of the older Boer woman's relationship with her daughter-in-law, which is strengthened by the respective deaths of their menfolk, and by the birth and raising of her grandson.

By centring upon this family unit, and by setting her allegory on a farm, Schreiner shifts her portrayal of the Dutch back to the up-country farming population- an image that she had moved away from in *An English-South African's View*- and overturns the 'demolition job' that she had performed on the colonial pastoral in *African Farm*. More importantly, she transforms, in the words of Burdett, the 'deadening pre-modernity represented by Tant' Sannie [...] into the *avant-garde* of new womanhood'.<sup>488</sup> In her early novels, Schreiner employed the colonial pastoral as a means of critiquing the Boers' seventeenth-century customs, ideals and beliefs. In *African Farm*, their fierce adherence to the past had led to their mental ossification and stunted their development as a race. In addition, their refusal to embrace the 'incoming tide' of nineteenth-century civilisation had prevented the farm's inhabitants from attaining to any form of intellectual, sexual or spiritual growth. As Schreiner makes apparent through Lyndall and Waldo, the farm's isolation from the 'great stream of [nineteenth-century] thought, morals, and knowledge' meant that any growth that did occur was the result of leaving or forming brief acquaintanceships with people outside of its confines, such as the two strangers. Similarly inferring that it was not just its inhabitants that had suffered as a result of their separation from nineteenth-century thought- Tant' Sannie's refusal to accept modern techniques compromises her ability to cultivate her crops- Schreiner insists that the barrenness of the landscape left neither plant nor human with any desire to take root on the farm. Indeed, not only does Lyndall believe that the farm will eventually suffocate her, but also critic Stephen Grey attests that the "land itself [was] dr[y]ing the vital juices out of its inhabitants, stunt[ing] them

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<sup>488</sup> Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 117. Her italics.

[...] and [...] disallow[ing] them from achieving man's most sacred desire, the desire to take root [...] and belong'''.<sup>489</sup> However, whereas in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', the two women similarly adhere to and surround themselves with the motifs of their seventeenth-century past, such as a large Bible, Schreiner makes it clear that it was not their pre-modernity that was having a deadening effect on them but rather their exposure to the 'diseases' that were eating away at South Africa. As we have seen, these diseases included British imperialism, capitalism and rule.

By rescuing the older woman's earlier exposure to and escape from these 'diseases', Schreiner contrasts the deadly and deadening incursions of British imperialism and rule with the 'joyous, free years' that she spent with her husband in their little farmhouse, in which illness, 'carking care, and anxiety played no part'.<sup>490</sup> Asserting that during these years they had had a ready supply of crops and game and were blessed with three sons, who grew 'strong and vigorous in the free life of the open veld', Schreiner cleverly undermines the demolition job that she had performed on the colonial pastoral by turning the farm into an emblem of life and growth. Not only does she exchange the 'dry sandy earth' of *African Farm*, with its coating of stunted Karroo bushes, for undulating slopes that yielded plentiful quantities of maize, pumpkins, sweet-cane and melons, but she also points up the benefits of the Boer woman and her family remaining untouched by the 'incoming tide' of nineteenth-century civilisation. Indeed, whereas in *African Farm*, Lyndall and Waldo's 'vital juices' were 'drying out' as a result of their lack of exposure to the 'great stream' of British knowledge and thought, in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', the 'incoming tide' of British capitalism and imperialism was threatening to submerge and sweep South Africa's 'vital juices' away from the land and its peoples. As she makes apparent in her other political works, at the same time as British capitalists were extracting the mineral 'juices' out of South Africa and sweeping them away to Europe, imperial forces were threatening to submerge the Boers and soak the land with their 'vital juices'. Whilst exploring the ramifications of the latter in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', Schreiner first draws attention to the Boers' historical conflicts with 'wild beasts' and with the 'spear[s] of the savage'. Indeed, not only is the older Boer woman's husband fatally wounded following a hunting trip with his 'Kaffir' servants- he returns to the farm with a 'wound eight inches long in his side where a lioness had torn him'- but also her second son dies after being struck with an

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<sup>489</sup> Quoted in Burdett, p. 169.

<sup>490</sup> Olive Schreiner, 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', in *Stories, Dreams and Allegories* (1923), p. 17.

assegai during a small 'native' war.<sup>491</sup> By having the two men die in 'fair, free fights' with their environment and with evenly matched black opponents, Schreiner simultaneously reaffirms their right to the land whilst drawing parallels between these equal and natural struggles and the unnatural incursions of the British. Of the former, as a means of reaffirming their right to the land, Schreiner infers that, in addition to having built the farmhouse and successfully cultivated their crops, the death of the Boer woman's husband strikes a metaphorical root into the Transvaal's soil and binds his family to it. This is similarly true of the death of her eldest son, who breaks his neck after he is thrown from his horse. As Schreiner writes, 'They took up his tall, strong body and the next day [...] they buried him beside his father [...] and another root was struck into the soil'.<sup>492</sup> Interestingly, even her second son, who dies away from the farm, dies in a mealie field surrounded by thick, dry stalks of corn, which symbolise food and new life, and finds himself buried under a large thorn tree. Thus, despite his death denying him the chance to strike his roots deep into the farm's soil, it is noteworthy that, throughout the Bible, the thorn tree was associated with love, endurance, resurrection and immortality. As I illustrate, these are all concepts that Schreiner employs in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', particularly in relation to her depiction of the Boer women. However, I first return to her portrayal of the unnatural incursions of British imperialists and capitalists.

Despite contending that life was 'going on peacefully' on the farm, Schreiner reminds her readers that its inhabitants were living with the ever-present fear that Britain's flag would attempt to 'unfurl itself over them again'.<sup>493</sup> Rescuing Britain's 1880 endeavours to 'unfurl itself' over the Transvaal, which had led to the 'First Boer War', Schreiner alleges that this 'unnatural' conflict was the result of its refusal to honour its promises and grant the Boers free government of their own Republics. Forcing the Boers to rise- and the younger woman's husband to pack his saddlebags and 'ride away to help'- it is important to note that, rather than returning to the farm to jubilantly recall their victories or dying of wounds that he had acquired during battle, he instead 'creeps home' with a 'deadly fever'.<sup>494</sup> What is particularly interesting about this 'fever' is not only does it kill him and lead to him striking his roots alongside his kin, but also Schreiner clearly draws parallels between his demise and the deadly and

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<sup>491</sup> 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', pp. 18-20.

<sup>492</sup> 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', p. 20.

<sup>493</sup> 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', p. 23.

<sup>494</sup> 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', pp. 24-25.

unnatural spread of British capitalism and imperialism. By likening them to a fever that had originated from and was maintained by an unnatural lust for gold and a rampant desire for exploiting other lands and peoples, she makes the point that they were spreading to and infecting even the remotest areas of South Africa's countryside, including the farm. Whilst alleging that they had infected the farm's inhabitants in the sense that they were indirectly responsible for the death of the younger woman's husband- and directly responsible for the later slaughter of her son- Schreiner intimates that their seventeenth-century 'social conditions' and 'passions' had protected the Boers against succumbing to the same unnatural lust for gold. Similarly inferring that the farmhouse acted as a buttress against the 'incoming tide' of nineteenth-century civilisation, Schreiner makes it apparent that, at the time of writing 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', she believed that the colonial pastoral had become the physical embodiment of the durability and immovability of the Boers themselves. As she notes of the six years that had passed between the death of the younger woman's husband and her son's formative years, 'all was as it had been at the little house among the slopes'.<sup>495</sup> Whereas in *African Farm*, the fact that both the farmhouse and its protagonists remained unchanged had been a source of great consternation to Schreiner, in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', she affirms that the endurance of the two Boer women and their aversion to change was something to be praised.

Forming part of what Burdett describes as the transformation of the 'deadening pre-modernity represented by Tant' Sannie [...] into the *avant-garde* of the new womanhood', I identify the extent to which Schreiner builds on ideas that she had initiated in *Thoughts*, and the way in which she applies them to the 'pre-modernity' of the two Boer women in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine'. As we have seen in Chapter Two, in *African Farm*, Tant' Sannie's 'pre-modernity'- and adherence to primitive ideas on marriage and religion- had had a deadening effect on her femininity and had caused her to sink into a state of parasitism. Indeed, by the end of the novel, as Burdett asserts in *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism*, the grotesquely obese Tant' Sannie has become as immovable physically as she is metaphorically. In *Thoughts*, on the other hand, Schreiner alleges that, whilst falling below the highest ideal and preventing them from attaining to the active growth and rapid development of their fellow Europeans, the Boers' adherence to these primitive values had afforded them a homogeneity that

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<sup>495</sup> 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', p. 27.

had saved them from the parasitism and confusion that was dominating nineteenth-century sex matters. Thus, as Schreiner points out in her article, 'The Boer Woman and the Modern Woman's Question', 'We know of few social [and racial] conditions in which the duties and enjoyments of life are so equally divided between the sexes', nor where the woman is 'so free and equivalent to the male'.<sup>496</sup> Making it evident that she was his equivalent socially, physically, sexually, economically and intellectually, I consider the extent to which Schreiner's female protagonists proved themselves to be the comrades and co-workers of their men-folk in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine'. Whereas before the death of her husband, the older Boer woman had proven herself to be his comrade and had taken on an equal share in the 'common work of life', after his accident, she has no choice but to oversee both the running of the farm and the upbringing of his three sons. Not only does she have to count the stock, manage the servants, supervise the ploughing of the land and plant and water the crops, but she also has to take sole responsibility for feeding, clothing and guiding her children into their adult years. Although, in *African Farm*, Schreiner criticises Tant' Sannie's subservient belief that women served no other purpose than to find a husband and raise their children, in 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', she intimates that both women were capable of becoming the 'co-worker[s] of man' and the 'sustainer[s] of her society'.<sup>497</sup> In addition, despite not physically participating in the conflicts involving her husband and sons- as her counterparts had done during the Great Trek and during their ongoing battles with the 'Zulus'- she has taught her sons how to shoot, clean and reload their guns and has encouraged them to 'go to the aid of their [...] kindred'.<sup>498</sup> Similarly decreeing in *Thoughts* that the 'First Boer War' was largely a woman's war, which was directed from the 'armchair beside the coffee table', Schreiner states that while the men were appearing on the 'fields of battle', their wives were 'heavily engaged at home in producing and rearing [...] the warriors of the nation'.<sup>499</sup> Having alluded to the ways in which the older Boer woman had 'produced' and raised these 'warriors' in the first part of 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', I examine Schreiner's depiction of the rearing of the younger woman's son.

Convinced that a voice had 'come down' on the night of her grandson's birth and told her that he would do great things for his land and people, both women

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<sup>496</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 175.

<sup>497</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 188.

<sup>498</sup> *Thoughts*, p. 176.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*

endeavour to do all that they can to make the older woman's prophecy a reality. Much to the consternation of their neighbours, not only do they refuse to treat him 'as any other child'- they let his hair grow long and never make him wear velschoens- but he also resists playing and running around with other Boer children. Preferring to hear about the history of his people to fictional tales about adventure and derring-do- which gives Schreiner the opportunity to rescue events such as the hangings at Slagter's Nek and remind her readers of Britain's exploitation of the Boers- it quickly becomes apparent that his favourite bed-time story is his grandmother's retelling of the annexation of Natal. Often re-enacting the Boer women's meeting with the British Commissioner, during which they pointed to the 'Drakens Berg' mountains and declared, 'We go across the mountains to freedom or to death', he tells his mother of his determination to go to Natal to try to recover the land of his peoples. Aside from rearing him on this history, and on the remembrances of everything that his father and uncles had done for their country, the women put every penny that they earn from cultivating the land into, and regularly go without food, drink and new clothing as a means of, providing for his future and 'getting him educated'. Hoping to send him to a school in the Colony and then to a university in Europe, it is significant that, unlike the British capitalists who extract the vital juices from the land and spend the proceeds in gambling halls, the two women use the money that they make from their crops to sustain the future of their race. This is even more apparent in the older woman's response to his death. Called to fight in the South African War, the women pack his saddle-bags with food and stitch sovereigns into his belt. Whilst initially learning of his movements around Krugersdorp, Johannesburg and Pretoria, they hear nothing from him after receiving a short note stating that he was on his way to the front. Later informed, by the younger son of the field-cornet that he has died of two bullet wounds and several stabs from a bayonet, which serves to highlight Boer robustness and the brutality of British imperialism, the two women, in spite of their devastation, resolve to carry on sowing seeds. As the older woman states, 'It [the war] may go on for long, our burghers must have food'.<sup>500</sup> Turning their grief into a positive symbol of love, resurrection and endurance, not only do these women help to sustain their race during times of war, but they also show a level of political autonomy that Schreiner was confident that British women could and should share.

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<sup>500</sup> 'Eighteen-Ninety-Nine', p. 54.

Indeed, before and during the war, Schreiner had used several methods as a means of trying to influence the course of South African affairs. Aside from her articles, pamphlets and allegories, she had relied heavily on the persuasiveness of her letters. As Stanley and Dampier affirm in their 2012 article, “‘I Just Express My Views and Leave Them to Work’”, ‘they were often written and used *as* politics, rather than just being about politics’.<sup>501</sup> Whilst, as I stated in Chapter One, Stanley and Dampier assess the level of influence that she had over Will Schreiner, John X. Merriman and Jan Hofmeyr from the 1890s to the 1920s, I look at the impact of her letters to Alfred Milner, Jan Smuts and her brother before and during the South African War. As Schreiner reveals in her correspondence to Milner, the aim of these letters was to steer these men away from a certain course of action, which she suspected would be detrimental to both them and their countries. Although there are not many of her letters to Milner in existence, they epitomise Schreiner’s determination to advise him against declaring war on the Boers. Sending him a copy of *An English-South African’s View*, the ‘truth’ of which she hoped would become apparent to him- i.e. that there was no real point in forcing war on the Transvaal- she then suggests to him that it might be worth his reading the ‘new life’ of George Grey. As she writes in July 1899, ‘You know we all met you with open arms & open hearts in South Africa saying, “Here is our new Sir George Grey”’.<sup>502</sup> Revisiting methods that she had employed during her friendship with Pearson, she endeavours to shame Milner into recognising what he could have done for white relations in South Africa, if he had filled the role of the ‘new Grey’ and replicated the political behaviour of a ‘shining light of our Imperial and Colonial system’.<sup>503</sup> Insisting that he had lost loyal supporters, in both Britain and South Africa, she made a last-ditch effort in May 1900 to remind him who his real enemies were- the Uitlanders- and that he would ultimately realise what she had tried to do for him. Whether this happened is unknown, but the majority of her political correspondents clearly respected her views, regardless of whether they agreed with Schreiner or not.

One recipient who did agree with her views, at that time, was the then state attorney of the Transvaal, Jan Smuts. In her letters to Smuts, she outlines the possibility of meeting with Milner and the issues that she would raise, such as the high level of

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<sup>501</sup> Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, “‘I Just Express My Views and Leave Them to Work’”: Olive Schreiner as a Feminist Protagonist in a Masculine Political Landscape with Figures and Letters”, *Gender and History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2012), p. 682.

<sup>502</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Alfred Milner, 10 July 1899, Special Collections, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 12-14.

<sup>503</sup> *An English-South African’s View*, p. 18.



Boer resistance and the anti-war feeling amongst the Uitlanders in Johannesburg. She also divulges to Smuts that she had been asked to act as war correspondent for the *New York Journal*. Wondering about the feasibility of going to the front with the Boers, so she could be on the spot, she entreats him to find out where she would be of most use and whether the 'Transvaal authorities [would] give [her] facilities for gaining information'.<sup>504</sup> Although her plan to go to the front never materialised, it illustrates both the reach of Schreiner's opinions, and the fact that they were highly regarded. In addition, she passed valuable information back to Smuts, regarding her friend, Adele Chapin, who was the wife of the U.S. Consul in Johannesburg. As Stanley and Dampier identify, this is an example of Schreiner using her letters to broker political deals and carry out political favours. Conscious of Chapin's close links with Milner and British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, she suggests that Smuts visits her and uses their meeting to his own advantage. Aware that whatever Smuts said would 'go straight' to Milner and Chamberlain, Schreiner affirms to him that 'it might be well to impress her with the fact that while we don't want to fight if [they are] determined to drive us to war, it will not be the walk over [...] that they dream of'.<sup>505</sup> This undoubtedly impressed Smuts- and Chapin, who had asked Schreiner to facilitate the meeting- and indicated how well connected she was. It also emphasised her credentials as a shrewd political commentator.

Another of Schreiner's correspondents who held her in high esteem was her younger brother, Will, who had been a leading political and legal figure in South African public life from 1887 until his death in 1919. In 1898, Will had become Prime Minister of the Cape, and in her letters to him during this period, she counsels him over how to act in relation to matters such as breaking completely with Rhodes, and keeping faith that he will win the election with 'flying colours'. Believing that he would strengthen the country's position, especially with regards to the impending war, she beseeched him to cultivate particular political allegiances and acknowledge the weak links within his own Ministry. When Will became involved in sending a shipment of weapons to the Free State- under the direction of politician Johannes Sauer- Schreiner expressed her surprise at his complicity in consenting to something illegal, and his

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<sup>504</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Jan Smuts, 24 September 1899, National Archives Repository, Pretoria, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 11-12.

<sup>505</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Jan Smuts, 1899, National Archives Repository, Pretoria, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 19-22. Schreiner's original punctuation.

mistake in 'giving the enemy cause to blaspheme your position'.<sup>506</sup> Proclaiming that, though his position was a difficult one, he was key to preventing war, Schreiner exhorts him to remain in his post. With war edging ever closer, she takes care to boost his morale by keeping him abreast of the strong support for *An English-South African's View*, and for his leadership, amongst Uitlanders in Johannesburg. In addition, by telling him of plots to 'get up a row' between the Boers and Uitlanders, as a means of provoking war, she demonstrates how valuable she was as a correspondent and the level of information she had been entrusted with. Similarly, as was the case with Pearson and Milner, she had tried to cajole Will to change his mind about the issues on which they differed, such as the annexation of the Transvaal by peaceful means and Kruger's refusal to concede to the Uitlanders' demands. This is also shown through her attempts to persuade him to remain firm against Rhodes and his Party, following the start of the war, and not to go down the 'dirty paths of Cape politics'.<sup>507</sup> Notably, in her letters to Will, she points up the part that she believed women could play in protesting against and alleviating the brutalities of war.

Not only did she speak at and send notices to several anti-war congresses, where she was joined by friends, such as Betty Molteno and Alice Greene, but also, as her letters to Smuts' wife, Isie, attest, she actively participated in war relief efforts in Hanover. Providing clothes, food and money to impoverished families, Schreiner was particularly upset by the execution of three Boer men, for allegedly assisting in the robbery and shooting of several passengers on a train. Collecting money to help support their families and retrieve their bodies from de Aar, she encouraged Isie amongst others, to make contributions to these funds. Despite being restricted by martial law in Hanover, and by her health problems, Schreiner demonstrated the scope for activity available to women during the war. Indeed, both pro-Boer and pro-British supporters organised rallies, protests and found ways of assisting the troops. Contrary to the belief that Schreiner had retreated into her asthma during this period, her letters, writing and involvement in the above activities testify to how active she had remained.

Thus, in this chapter, I have weighed up Schreiner's responses to the events leading up to the South African War and to the war itself. I have also situated them within her wider arguments about race. Additionally, I have illustrated her increasing

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<sup>506</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to William Philip ("Will") Schreiner, 20 April 1899, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', line 16.

<sup>507</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to William Philip ("Will") Schreiner, 20 June 1900, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 20-21.

conviction that women and maternity were central to heading the resistance against and limiting the damage wrought by the atrocities carried out in the name of British capitalism and imperialism.

### Conclusion:

#### From White to Black: Schreiner and the Aftermath of the South African War

Following the declaration of peace in 1902, Schreiner grew increasingly alarmed at the bigotry, tensions and ‘pitiful smallnesses’ that were making themselves felt in a poverty-stricken Hanover, and amongst the defeated Boers generally. Having already been compelled to turn her back on the British, a distressed Schreiner remarked, in a 1907 letter to Alice Greene, that it seemed as ‘though after the strain of the war & the pain of being hated, a great terrible mental & moral reaction & deterioration ha[d] set in [on the Boers].’<sup>508</sup> Not only was she bewildered by their rejection of her as an Englishwoman- especially after all she had done to aid them during the war- but she was also horrified by their mounting intolerance and illiberal attitude towards the black South Africans. Conscious that this attitude was shared by British capitalists, who, in the aftermath of the war, were keen to ‘close ranks’ with the Boers in order to exploit the ‘natives’ for their own ends, Schreiner’s allegiances, and the focus of her letters and writing, shifted back from the whites to the blacks. Particularly concerned about proposals to unite the four settler states (the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and the Cape Colony) under the dominion of the British Empire, Schreiner endorsed her preference for federation in both her letters and her political pamphlet *Closer Union* (1909). Convinced that a ‘body’ of individual self-governing states would help South Africa attain to the ‘highest form of [freedom and] social organisation’, Schreiner was only too aware of the detrimental effect that union would have on the ‘dark man’.<sup>509</sup> As she notes in a letter to Edward Carpenter in February 1909:

If the plans of this miserable convention [who would decide the terms of the constitution] are carried out [...] There is no hope of even that little shred of justice to the natives there has been in years past. The Rand capitalists & the retrograde Boers are going to dominate the country.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Alice Greene, 14 May 1907, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 19-21.

<sup>509</sup> Olive Schreiner, ‘Letter on the South African Union and the Principles of Government’, *Transvaal Leader* (22 December 1908), pp. 8-9.

<sup>510</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 19 February 1909, Sheffield Libraries, Archives & Information, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 21-25.

Arguing that the ‘native question’ was the ‘root question’ of this constitution and would determine South Africa’s future, Schreiner warned against the dire consequences that would result from white dominion and from refusing the ‘dark’ and ‘Asiatic’ races a ‘share in the higher duties of life and citizenship’.<sup>511</sup> Again employing her letters as a means of cajoling key politicians such as Jan Smuts and F. S. Malan into recognising the benefits of extending the Cape’s limited non-racial franchise and educating the ‘natives’, she makes it clear that if they treated them as mere ‘engine[s] of labour’, they would reduce them to a ‘great seething, ignorant proletariat’.<sup>512</sup> However, in spite of her best efforts- and the liberal stances taken by her brother, Will, and other Cape politicians- Schreiner knew that there was a high probability that these attempts would fail. This was due to the fact that, regardless of their individual feelings towards the ‘native question’, these politicians were willing to sacrifice their principles and ideals in order to promote wider white interests and unity. Watching them ‘squirm’ and ‘butter each other up’ during the drafting of the Act of Union, which she witnessed from the gallery of the Cape Parliament, Schreiner referred to it, in a letter to Will, as the ‘most contemptible [event] from the broad human stand-point I have ever seen in my life’.<sup>513</sup> Not only did this event tempt her to ‘draw a veil’ over her involvement in South Africa’s political affairs and cement her dedication to the ‘native cause’, but it also encouraged her to protest against the policies that would arise from union and prove fatal to relations between the country’s whites and blacks. These policies included Schreiner’s resignation of the Women’s Enfranchisement League, her vocal support of the ‘Universal Races Congress’ (1911), which opposed the Union of South Africa’s colour bar, and her vehemence towards the Natives Land Act (1913), which created a system of land tenure that deprived the majority of black inhabitants from owning land. In addition, she spoke out against the enforced slavery of imported Chinese miners, raised money for the jailed leader of a municipal workers’ strike in Port Elizabeth, cultivated friendships with black political leaders, such as Mohandas Gandhi, and joined a Missionary Commission to help discredit claims about the supposed ‘black peril’. Of the latter, whilst female suffrage members, in both the Transvaal and Free State, insisted that black men posed a sexual threat to white women, Schreiner set about

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<sup>511</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Closer Union: A Letter on the South African Union and the Principles of Government* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1909), p. 49. In the Cape Colony, they operated a property and literacy based franchise- and any black man fulfilling these qualifications was able to vote.

<sup>512</sup> *Closer Union*, p. 50.

<sup>513</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Philip (“Will”) Schreiner, 9 April 1909, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 9-11.

collecting information that proved that the ‘peril which has long over shadowed this country, is one which exists for all dark skinned women at the hands of white men’.<sup>514</sup> Notably this is a ‘peril’ which Schreiner examines in depth in her posthumously published novel *From Man to Man* (1926).

Written throughout her lifetime, ‘one of the centre points’ of *From Man to Man* is, as she notes in an 1908 letter to Will, that her protagonist Rebekah adopts and raises as her own ‘a little half-coloured child who is her husband’s by a coloured servant’.<sup>515</sup> Although Schreiner herself argues, in the above letter, that the novel ‘opens up the whole question of our relation to the darker races’, I believe it similarly reinforces the extent to which her ‘relationship’ to race and social Darwinism had changed.<sup>516</sup> Building on arguments that she had made in her letters and earlier political works, Schreiner not only repudiates the conventional notions of racial superiority and inferiority- by insinuating that it was white Europeans rather than blacks that were a ‘down-draught on humanity’- but also dismissively describes Darwinists as ‘ass[es] masquerading in the scientific lion’s skin’.<sup>517</sup> In doing so, *From Man to Man* verifies that Schreiner had disregarded, and completely distanced herself from, the Darwinist thinking that, according to Barash, dominated her writing and was undeniably present in her earlier novels. Indeed, when her sons refuse to walk alongside their ‘nigger’ step-sister, Rebekah tells them a story of a new, strange and terrible race who have arrived on earth, and have been treating human beings as their ‘inferiors’. By having Rebekah’s allegorical white-faced race take over the earth, break down countries, governments and laws, and force the ‘inferior races’ to serve them, Schreiner clearly draws parallels between Union, British imperialism and capitalism and the impact that they were having on the black South Africans. Contradicting Gordimer’s claims that she was trapped in the ‘prison-house of colonialism’, Schreiner proved definitively that she was cognisant of the ‘voteless, powerless state’ of the ‘dark’ races and did not place their needs secondary to her desire for female equality (as we have seen through her resignation from the WEL).

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<sup>514</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to James Henderson, 26 December 1911, Cory Library, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 14-16.

<sup>515</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Philip (“Will”) Schreiner, 4 June 1908, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 29-32.

<sup>516</sup> ‘Olive Schreiner to William Philip (“Will”) Schreiner, 4 June 1908, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription’, lines 35-36.

<sup>517</sup> Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man* (1926), ed., Paul Foot (London: Virago Press, 1982), pp. 202-221.

Indeed, as the similarities between Rebekah's 'fallen' sister Bertie, who becomes embroiled in an intimate relationship with her tutor and later descends into prostitution, and her sexually exploited African servant reveal, Schreiner used her later writing to highlight the interconnectedness of sexual and racial equality. Furthering this connection through Rebekah's humiliating and oppressive relationship with the duplicitous Frank, who believes her interests should revolve solely around marriage and motherhood, Schreiner insinuates that the majority of women, regardless of colour, will be subjected to some form of exploitation until racial and sexual inequalities are dispensed with entirely. As we have seen in Chapters Three and Four, this interconnectedness is also present in her other works. Whereas in *African Farm*, for example, Schreiner stresses the racial discrepancies between the English Lyndall and her fellow black and white South Africans, in *Trooper Peter*, she acknowledges the analogies between Peter's washerwoman mother- and her subjugation by her wealthy customers- and his own exploitation of two African servants. In addition, in *Trooper Peter*, she makes it evident that it is Peter's humanitarian upbringing that makes him a prime candidate for conversion, and that it is mother-love that will ultimately heal the differences between South Africa's white and dark races. As she writes in *From Man to Man*, mother-love was 'not merely one of the highest but one of the strongest forces modifying human life'.<sup>518</sup> This ability to modify human life is especially obvious in *An English-South African's View*, in which she infers that approaching South Africa's racial situation from a maternal standpoint would circumvent the need for war. Yet, regardless of the approaches that she had taken towards preventing war and remedying the problems between the white and blacks, critics, such as Schoeman and First and Scott, have tended to centre on Schreiner's ineffectiveness and failure as a political commentator.

Stemming from Cronwright's *Life*, and from his purposeful destruction and concealment of many of his wife's letters, Schreiner has been branded as being too emotional, as having exaggerated her influence over South African affairs, as having made little political impact and as having retreated into her asthma during the War years and after. As this thesis has established, through its re-reading of her polemical texts and her letters, Schreiner did, in fact, have a shrewd understanding of the cost of war between the Boers and British, of the debt that would accrue from mistreating the black

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<sup>518</sup> *From Man to Man*, p. 212.

and Asiatic races, and of the country's future as a whole. Rescuing European and American history to reinforce these points, I believe that any emotion Schreiner does display in these works or in her letters is usually part of a calculated manoeuvre to target the self-interest, conscience or liberal-minded instincts of particular individuals, groups or audiences. As we have seen in Chapter Three, this is a tactic that she employs to great effect in *Trooper Peter*. It is also a method she relies on heavily in her correspondence to key politicians, such as Smuts, Malan and Merriman. Aware, as Dampier and Stanley remark in 'Olive Schreiner on Union' (2010), of the latter's 'shakiness' on the 'native question', Schreiner simultaneously praises him for his speech on the 'Native Bill' whilst berating his failure to vote against it.<sup>519</sup> Reminding him of his liberal obligations in a letter written in 1910, she states:

The wagon of South Africa is beginning to make a long slide back-wards on the muddy road of time; & I am thankful that if you are not on the wagon chest as driver, that at least you are still walking along side to put a stone under the wheels now & then.<sup>520</sup>

As Stanley and Dampier's article, "I Just Express My Views and Leave Them to Work" (2012) demonstrates, whilst Schreiner's inability to persuade Merriman to vote against the Bill could be treated as evidence of her ineffectiveness as a political commentator, the fact that she was in contact with such men, and that they took her opinions seriously, refutes this. In addition, the high sales of her polemical texts and the value that her international audiences and the mass media placed on her views, prove that she was not exaggerating the sway that she had over South African political affairs. As American reporter, Montagu White, disclosed in a letter to politician Percy Molteno in February 1900, 'In discussing the Transvaal question I have been astonished to find what influence Olive Schreiner seems to have, especially among cultivated Americans'.<sup>521</sup> Although much has been made of her inactivity during the South African War and after, this thesis has determined that Schreiner remained politically

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<sup>519</sup> Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, "Men Selling Their Souls & the Future- & Fate Watching Them": Olive Schreiner on Union', *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2010), p. 133.

<sup>520</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to John X. Merriman, 22 December 1910, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 15-18.

<sup>521</sup> Letter from Montagu White to Percy Molteno (26 February 1900), quoted in Liz Stanley, Helen Dampier and Andrea Salter, 'Olive Schreiner globalising social inquiry: A feminist analytics of globalisation', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (2010), p. 663.



active and influential throughout this period. Not only was she attempting to alter the course of events through her letters, articles, journalism and speeches at public meetings, but she also raised money for and supported those most affected by war and by South Africa's volatile racial situation.

By redressing these incorrect assumptions about the extent of her political activities during this period, and about her dependency on social Darwinism, this thesis has emphasised the need for recognising the importance of Schreiner's political writing and her role as a political commentator. By tracing her changing views on race from childhood to the early 1900s, in her writing and as a result of her sojourn in Europe, I have ascertained that Schreiner's allegiances shifted from the British to the Dutch, and between the Dutch and black South Africans. Endeavouring to do all she could strengthen relations between these groups, and to defend the Boers against the British and the blacks against the whites, I believe that Schreiner's 'failures' as a political commentator originate not from her emotionality or over-inflated opinion of her own worth, but from circumstance. Whilst Schreiner's opinions on war and race were highly regarded and sought after, she was writing at a time when black inferiority was widely accepted, and British imperialism and jingoism were at their zenith. Thus, regardless of what she did or did not say, her analyses and observations were always going to be too unpalatable to the majority to effect great racial and political change. Aware of this herself, Schreiner states in a letter to Malan, in which she discusses the bravery of the man who is willing to stand alone, that he:

sacrifices [...] ambitions [...] & [...] friendships & associations [...] & accepts what seems failure & defeat- but the large human ends of humanity & justice for which he lived go on & triumph because he suffered defeat & failure.<sup>522</sup>

As in the case of Peter Halket, whose actions have been labelled an irrevocable failure in spite of the fact that he saved the life of a black man, I believe that critics need to stop interpreting Schreiner's non-fiction in terms of her failures and instead acknowledge her value as a political commentator. Indeed, as I have argued in this thesis, not only is it time to acknowledge the importance of her views on race, but it is also time to recognise that they should take their rightful and equal place alongside her feminist works within the Schreiner canon.

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<sup>522</sup> 'Olive Schreiner to Francois Stephanus ('FS') Malan, 6 January 1909, National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription', lines 62-66.

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