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An examination of the personality of a writer and her material

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O L I V E S C H R E I N E R

An examination of the personality of a writer and her material

"Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath and infinite despair?"

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Thesis

Introduction (1)

Olive Schreiner was born in 1855, and died at the age of sixty-five. The greater part of her life was spent in wretchedness: she suffered from ill-health from about the age of seventeen and from painfully-tinged emotional disturbances from an even earlier age. Biography is frequently regarded as an interloper in criticism, and, indeed, it does not help us with questions of value. My concern is not with the value of Olive's work, although I make judgments, but with the relationship between her personality and her material.

Besides The Story of an African Farm Olive wrote allegories, short stories, political and semi-sociological work, and two other novels, Undine and From Man to Man. The stories and allegories are thin and naive, almost vulgar. Undine and From Man to Man are not up to the standard of An African Farm, a great novel in spite of its faults. When one compares them with that novel one finds that they are unmistakeably cut from the same cloth and that their faults are the faults which all but mar An African Farm.

Most of Olive's works -Undine is an exception- were written after The Story of an African Farm. For forty years after that novel was finished, Olive went on writing. A large part of her creative activity during those forty years went into the writing of From Man to Man, a novel she could neither finish nor leave alone. She asserted that she felt compelled to go on writing. Why -if we can accept her assertion- did

-she-

she feel compelled to write? What was it she was trying to express? Her behaviour and her material, especially the material of her novels, suggest an answer.

In our time Olive has, I think, more admirers than readers. For that reason I present the novels in some detail.

Part 1.

THE NOVELS

"I would like to have your critical judgment of my mind, or rather of my work, which is really me."

Letters.

1. UNDINE

What one finds most interesting about the works of Olive Schreiner is the continual recurrence of certain material: she is preoccupied with painful experience.

This material is present in profusion in her first novel, Undine. Undine is undeniably poor stuff, but it deserves careful consideration. Although inferior to An African Farm it was written more or less at the same time as that novel, and it was Olive Schreiner's first expression at any length of something she went on trying to say for the rest of her life.

Never was heroine of fiction more ill-starred than Undine, whose life-story, from childhood, is the material of the novel.

The sub-title of the novel is: A Queer Little Child. Undine is a sensitive child, persistently misunderstood by members of her family. Orthodox Christianity is taught in the home, and the doctrine of the damnation of souls causes her the greatest misery. She cannot accept that God, who ordains that millions of souls go to destruction, can be good: He must be wicked and cruel. She is considered wicked by her family, and this view she shares. She is wretchedly aware that she is 'different', and while still very young (about ten years old) wishes that she were dead. Painfully she arrives at a belief that God - not the God of the Bible but a God she "feels in her own soul" - will let nothing He has made be destroyed. At about the age of sixteen she is made miserable again by the chapel-goers in her guardian's circle. She wonders at this stage whether it would "be so wherever she

-might-

might go, that her hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against hers?"[1] In this novel religion is associated with hypocrisy.

Throughout her life she is misunderstood by the people with whom she comes in contact. For example, when she is suffering deeply in silence, she is thought "a cold, dull, heartless little creature".[2]

Chance pursues her relentlessly. She is jilted by the man she loves through the activities of a mischief-maker; her child dies as soon as she begins to love it; an aunt to whom she is very attached becomes a snarling, insane creature. When Undine is in Africa, she accepts a lift to the Diamond Fields and is persecuted by the wife of the owner of the *wagon*; practically destitute on her arrival there, she is robbed of her few possessions.

Chance is assisted by Undine herself. She marries a rich, repulsive, lecherous widower so that she may give money to his son Albert, who has jilted her. Albert marries an heiress, and neither knows about nor needs her sacrifice. Everyone thinks that she has married the old man for his money. Of course she sticks to her side of the bargain with chill fidelity. When the old man dies she gives all his money to his sons, and sets off for Africa with ten pounds.

On board ship she slips half her total wealth into the portmanteau of a poor governess who has been ill-used by an elderly aunt, and thereafter, destitute and frequently on the verge of starvation, she seems to glory in giving away what little she has. She gives half her only crust of bread to a starving dog; she sells a diamond-ring she has apparently kept throughout her poverty, and gives the proceeds anonymously, of course, to a young man to enable him to go back

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1. Undine, p. 56.
2. Ibid. p. 131.

to England; money brought to her for ironing she gives to the servant who brings it.

Physical pain and suffering fall to her lot, too. She writhes on the ground, like, says her creator, "a crushed worm", when Albert jilts her, and is bruised. She, who has given away a fortune, slaves over the irons so that she may eat. She crushes a rose in her hands till her fingers bleed, and they bleed again when she tries to earn a living by sewing. Dying, she drags herself along the ground, face downward in the dust.

The sympathetic characters have unenviable fates. Aunt Margaret's fiancé is drowned and Margaret goes mad; the governess, whom Undine meets on board ship, is rewarded after a hard drab life with a sight of the grave of the man she loves; Undine's only friend at the Diamond Fields, Diogenes, a sensitive child, is paralysed as a result of a beating given her by her mother. Albert's mistress and the mother of his child, who, we are given to understand, is ennobled by her love for him, drowns herself when the child dies, and the other baby in the novel, Undine's by her old husband, dies too.

The suffering is unskilfully contrived: the machinery creaks.

One last word before we leave Undine. The book is hag-ridden by what we might call the older-woman figure. She appears as Undine's unsympathetic mother, as a chapel-goer, as the governess's aunt, as the mother of the paralysed child, as Mrs Snappercaps. A little younger, she appears as Albert's cold, foolish wife, and as the dishonest Malay woman. And we should not forget the dreadful figure of God, triumphing over the damned. We shall meet these again.

-THE-

ii. THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

As early as 1876, when An African Farm was not yet finished and Undine not yet revised, Olive decided not to publish Undine,[1] and it was not published, in fact, until after her death. In later years, after asking Havelock Ellis to return the manuscript to her so that she could destroy it, she seems literally to have forgotten Undine's existence.[2] It is possible that she regarded An African Farm as a second and better expression of what she had been trying to say in Undine. This would account, in a limited sense, for the fact that there is repetition of Undine material in An African Farm. The scene where the child Undine listens to a ticking clock and is appalled at the thought that a soul goes to damnation every second is described as an experience of Waldo in the second novel. The scene where Undine opens the Bible for a "sign" and, disappointed, hurls the book from her is given as autobiographical fact in the chapter "Times and Seasons" of An African Farm. The sameness of material goes, however, beyond mere repetition of scenes, and cannot be accounted for by the theory that Olive regarded An African Farm as Undine rewritten.

Olive intended to call her second novel Mirage, with the sub-title: A Series of Abortions,[3] and the book is a record of frustration, a "striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing."[4] The frustration is endured by three children -Waldo, Lyndall and Em- to whom we are introduced at the beginning of the novel and whose lives we follow, and by old Otto, Waldo's father. Olive believed that these three children represented facets of her own personality, and positively identified them with herself. It is interesting to see

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1. Journal entry quoted in Cronwright-Schreiner's Introduction to Undine, p. 10.
2. Ibid. p. 5f.
3. Introduction to An African Farm, by Cronwright-Schreiner, p. 18.
4. An African Farm, p. 122.

what she causes to happen to the three,believing them to be herself. But in a different sense,which will be discussed later,she was indeed writing about herself and for herself,and in this sense she is as closely identified with the unsympathetic characters as she is with the sympathetic ones.

Although Waldo and Lyndall are the central characters,it is more convenient to begin our examination with another pair: Waldo's father,old Otto,who is overseer on a farm belonging to the widow Tant' Sannie, and Bonaparte Blenkins, an adventurer who comes to the farm. These characters are complementary: their rôles are those of victim and torturer. Each seems to have been created for his rôle: old Otto to suffer,and Bonaparte to be the agent of his suffering.

Otto is filled with an unwavering love for the Redeemer, whose presence has become very real to him. He lives in the word of Christ: is humble,generous,trusting, without interest in material things. To the farm comes Bonaparte, a penniless, unscrupulous and not very plausible adventurer. Bonaparte constantly has the Lord's name on his lips, and Otto believes all his stories of misfortune. Pitying Bonaparte, Otto intercedes with Tant' Sannie for him, and gives him his own bed. It is not long before he has given Bonaparte his only hat, his brandy, his cherished right to conduct the Sunday service, and his best suit and boots so that Bonaparte shall conduct the service fittingly equipped. It is not to Bonaparte only that Otto gives: he makes good losses from a flock rather than get the herdboy into trouble, and he gives the herdboy's wife, whom Tant' Sannie has turned out of doors, his coat and some

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food. All the recipients of his gifts despise him. Gradually Bonaparte becomes very cool to Otto, having established himself firmly in Tant' Sannie's good graces. Finally Bonaparte makes mischief between Otto and Tant' Sannie, and Otto is ordered to leave the farm at once, most of his meagre possessions being seized. Having prepared for his departure, he dies.

In the eyes of the thrice-widowed Tant Sannie who believes that he will marry her, Bonaparte can do no wrong. He has a power on the farm, and turns his attention to Waldo.

Waldo is the central character of <u>An African Farm</u>. He is an imaginative and sensitive child, who undergoes extremely painful religious experiences. Like Undine, he listens in terror to the watch ticking; he waits with faith for a sign from heaven, and is disappointed; like Undine he feels that God hates him, and is filled with a sense of his own wickedness. "He felt horribly lonely. There was not one thing so wicked as he in the whole world, and he knew it. He folded his arms and began to cry...and his tears left scorched marks where they fell...." Then he makes aloud to the veld the confession of what he has carried in his heart for a year: "'I hate God!.....I love Jesus [illegible], but I hate God!'" There is a terrible finality in the confession, for now his own soul is lost for ever. "...It was ended now. Better so....Better so! But oh, the loneliness and agonised pain! for that night and for nights on nights to come! The anguish that sleeps all day on the heart like a heavy worm, and wakes up at night to feed.

"There are some of us who in after years say to

-Fate-

Fate, 'Now deal us your hardest blow.....but let us never again suffer as we suffered when we were children.'"[1]

Waldo reaches a state of complete, unquestioning faith in and love for Jesus Christ, with whom he yearns to be united. This faith he loses when he returns to the farm one day to learn that his father is dead. The news is broken to him in the following manner. Eager to see his father and friends the child springs off the wagon. Bonaparte stops him.

"' Good-morning,my dear boy. Where are you running to so fast with your rosy cheeks?'

" The boy looked up at him,glad even to see Bonaparte.

"' I am going to the cabin,' he said out of breath.

"' You won't find them in just now - not your good old father,' said Bonaparte.

"' Where is he?' asked the boy.

"' There beyond the camps,' said Bonaparte,waving his hand oratorically towards the stone-walled ostrich camps.

"' What's he doing there?' asked the boy.

" Bonaparte patted him on the cheek kindly.

"' We could not keep him any more,it was too hot. We've buried him,my boy,' said Bonaparte,touching with his finger the boy's cheek. 'We couldn't keep him any more. He, he, he! ' laughed Bonaparte, as the boy fled along the low stone long wall..."[2]

Bonaparte continues his attentions to Waldo. He trips him up,on one occasion, much to the enjoyment of Tant' Sannie, and then improves on the joke by tripping him up again,headfirst into a pigsty. Waldo puts all his time,love and care into the making of a small sheep-shearing machine. It is his dearest possession. Seeing

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1. An African Farm, p. 33f.
2. Ibid. p. 109f.

it one day, Bonaparte suggests a slight improvement - and crushes it beneath his foot. Waldo's world is magically brightened by the discovery of some books in the loft. One he takes down with him, and it is seized by Bonaparte and burned by Tant' Sannie. and the loft is locked. He goes one night, planning to reach the loft by way of the roof, and then changes his mind. At this stage he feels, as Undine felt, that every man's hand is against his. Bonaparte sees him returning from this expedition, and finding out that dried peaches are kept in the loft, tells Tant' Sannie that Waldo is taking the peaches. She questions him about it, and Waldo, just as Undine might have done, says nothing. Bonaparte ties him up in the fuelhouse, and beats him until the blood runs, with the greatest possible enjoyment, and the Bible on his lips; "...the boy," says the author, "was literally cut up."[1]

But Bonaparte's day is on the wane. Tant' Sannie hears him flirting with her wealthy niece, and drives him out. It is of course Waldo who gives his food and money as he is leaving.

Waldo broods and dreams on the farm until he is a young man, and then he leaves home to see the world. He comes back to the farm having lost his horse, and without any possessions, to find only Em there, for Lyndall has left. As soon as he arrives home, he sits down to write to Lyndall, whom he loves, about his adventures. He has been exploited, robbed, lonely, worked to a point of utter exhaustion. He describes in appalling detail the maltreatment of an ox by the transport-driver for whom he worked. He is happy to be back; happy to be in a world that, somewhere, contains Lyndall. He writes on and on, until Em says that it is no use

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1. An African Farm. p. 147.

writing any more, because Lyndall is dead.... In the days that follow, Waldo cries in anguish for the ability to believe in a Hereafter, where he may see Lyndall once again, but he, as Undine was, is comforted by a realisation that there is an indestructible universal life, of which he and Lyndall are a part.

Em offers him money, a legacy from Lyndall, with which he can go and study. This he refuses. He dies, accepting his lot with tranquillity, aware of the treachery of the world, but enjoying its beauty. The tranquillity is that of defeat, and his death an escape to be desired because "... if one lived, the eager, striving, passionate heart would rise again."[1.]

Lyndall represents the "keen analytical intellect" which, Olive said in a letter to Havelock Ellis, stood by her, "watching", before her first visit to England.[2.] She is less a character than a mouthpiece for and an acting-out of her creator's theories and attitudes.

As a child she is pretty, cynical, intelligent, determined to get away from the farm and use her assets to get for herself the material things of the world. She has sufficient strength of character to make Tant' Sannie and Bonaparte afraid of her. She is proud and does not ever give these two the satisfaction of seeing that they have hurt her. She respects Waldo, and is attached to him, although she disapproves of his metaphysical burrowing.

She is exposed to the same type of humiliation as a child as Waldo is. For example, on the night the old German

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1. O.S. to Havelock Ellis, 10 Dec. 1884, Letters, p. 49 f.
2. 19 Nov. 1884, ibid. p. 45.

is told to go, she and Em are locked in their rooms. To Em's horror, Lyndall breaks all the windowpanes, and attempts to force the shutter, but it does not give. She then attacks the shutter with her penknife, the blade of which, when she has made some progress, breaks. She determines to set fire to the shutter, indifferent to the possibility of burning the house down. There is only one match. She lights it carefully, applies it to a piece of paper, and then it, and the smouldering paper go out. She goes to bed, but Em flings herself on the door, calling wildly to be let out.

"' Oh, Lyndall, what are we to do?' she asks.
"Lyndall wiped a drop of blood off the lip she had bitten.

"' I am going to sleep,' she said. 'If you like to sit there and howl till the morning, do. Perhaps you will find that it helps; I never heard that howling helped anyone.'"[1]

She manages to get Tant' Sannie to send her to school. She returns at about the age of sixteen, beautiful, and an ardent feminist. In accordance with her desire to learn and experience, she has had sexual relations with a man whom she has refused to marry, for he was not the great perfect being she was looking for, and she believed that a marriage without perfect love would be, in Olive's words,"a lifelong fornication and prostitution".[2] She is pregnant.

In the meantime Em has become engaged to Gregory Rose, an effeminate petulant young man who is the new overseer on the farm. He falls in love with Lyndall, who asks him to marry her (for the child's sake), on the understanding that he shall expect nothing from the marriage. She does not tell him that she is pregnant. She then writes a cool letter to her lover, who comes to the farm and once again

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1. An African Farm, p. 102.
2. letter to Mr Lloyd, quoted on p. 225, Life.

offers to marry her. She refuses his offer, but agrees t go away with him, unmarried. They go away; the baby is born and dies, and Lyndall becomes very ill. After some time, Lyndall's stranger leaves her, and she lies dying in a little village. There Gregory Rose, who still worships her, finds her. He disguises himself as a woman and nurses her. She dies when she is seventeen. Olive Schreiner protested in an interview with Arthur Symons that the death was not to be interpreted as retribution, but as an episode in humanity's battle against the Universe, here, against disease.[1] In the end Lyndall wanted nothing from life except freedom from the pain which, with the exception of one outburst, she has borne stoically. She steadfastly refused to marry her lover.

Like Undine, she is misunderstood; like Undine, Waldo and Otto, she cannot keep material possessions, nor like Undine and Waldo, accept them when they are offered to her.

Two characters remain to be discussed: Em and Tant' Sannie.

Em is a simple loving child, ready to accept what she is told, and without a view of the larger world outside the farm. Waldo's and Lyndall's discussions are incomprehensible to her. She is one who has given out much love in her life, and she is very happy when Gregory offers his love. This love she loses, and when Gregory returns to her after Lyndall's death, asked by the dying Lyndall to marry her, she marries him, but the glory has departed.

The study of Tant' Sannie, Em's stepmother, is, according to Cronwright-Schreiner, an objective and humorous one, and Olive was of this opinion herself. This is interesting, because Tant' Sannie is a vicious character. Olive mocks at some of her weaknesses gently, but the mockery deepens into disgust. She is shown as gross, stupid and sensual, the

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1. Life, p. 189.

willing agent of some of Bonaparte's machinations against old Otto and Waldo, and she clearly derives sadistic pleasure from Waldo's discomforture.

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The noteworthy features of Undine are repeated in An African Farm. The wretched childhood; the painful religious experiences; the strong sense of guilt that rejection of the Deity brought; mental and physical torments inflicted on the weak; stupidity and sadism accompanying religious fervour; the defeat of great possibilities in Waldo and Lyndall; the deliberate rejection by Waldo, Otto and Lyndall of material goods; death for Lyndall and Waldo, and life emptied of value for Em, and finally, the death of a baby. It is the gross Tant' Sannie who lives on, her desire for a fourth husband realised. Her place is, of course, with the sinister 'older-woman' figures, whose presence we noted in Undine.

iii FROM MAN TO MAN.

Not earlier than 1873, and not later than 1875, Olive Schreiner began From Man to Man. A large part of An African Farm had been written and Undine completed but not revised. On From Man to Man Olive worked for about forty years, although the work, according to references in her diary and letters, was quite far advanced in 1877, and finished, except for the "Prelude", before 1884, probably in 1882. Thereafter, she cut it up, to use her own words, and changed it, until: "I don't know how to put it together... I would

-give-

give hundreds of pounds if I had never touched it and published it just as it was."[1] But we shall return to the very interesting history of the writing of this novel later.

The theme of From Man to Man is "the story of a prostitute and of a married woman who loves another man, and whose husband is sensual and unfaithful."[2] Of these two women, Bertie and Rebekah, she writes: "Not Lyndall, not even Waldo, have been quite so absolutely real to me.."[3], and elsewhere: "Rebekah is me; I don't know which is which any more. But Bertie is me, and Drummond is me, and all is me... Sometimes I really don't know whether I am I or one of the others."[4]

The novel opens with a "Prelude" called "The Child's Day", which was written when Olive was thirty-three. It is clear that she had not yet done with her childhood. The child is Rebekah and her experiences are those of Undine and Waldo. The painful material is, as it were, seen from a greater distance, and seems to be much more under control. For example, Rebekah talking to an imaginary baby tells it not to be afraid of the ticking clock: "..don't think it means any of those dreadful things - it doesn't!"[5] But if the child's sufferings are no longer forced upon our attention, the lack of love and understanding in the child's environment is.

Rebekah promises never to call her (imaginary) baby a strange child; she herself is always being reproached,

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1. O.S. to H.E., 12 July 1884, Letters, p. 28.
2. O.S. to H.E., 29 Oct. 1884, ibid. p. 43f.
3. O.S. to H.E., 7 Jan. 1890, ibid. p. 175.
4. O.S. to H.E., 24 Jan. 1888, ibid. p. 129.
5. From Man to Man, p. 17.

laughed at and neglected: "It hurt her so that they talked of her."[1] She wishes, as Undine wished, that she were dead. Her favourite story is that of a boy who had no-one to love him except his pig, and in her fantasies wild animals are kind to her. She has, on one occasion, the sensation that she is filled with "abandoned wickedness"[2]. She lavishes love on the corpse of a new-born baby, which she does not realise is dead. She differs from the children in Olive's other novels in her strong maternal feelings.

Rebekah grows into a highly intelligent woman, a student of nature, and a great reader. She marries a stupid sensualist who is frequently unfaithful to her. She trusts him completely, but proofs of his infidelities are forced upon her. She writes him a 16,000-word letter (which he doesn't read) in which she tells him what she has found out and reproaches him. It appears that she has previously offered him a divorce, so that he may marry Mrs Drummond, their neighbour and one of his first mistresses. When she made this offer she was joyful, she says, at being able to help him enter into an ideal relationship. When she discovers that he has other mistresses, including a coarse fourteenyear-old schoolgirl and their coloured servant, she reluctantly comes to the conclusion that none of these 'affairs' represents an ideal relationship, and she therefore gives him the choice between divorce and living in the same house without any sort of close relationship between them.

When he refuses to read the letter she talks to him about the matter in an agony of grief and self-abasement. Where Undine once writhed like a crushed worm, Rebekah cowers like a stricken dog. Frank is put out about her discoveries,

-but-

1. From Man to Man, p. 36.
2. Ibid. p. 32.

but hopes she "will come to her senses". He will not agree to a divorce, because that would leave her as free to marry as it leaves him, and it is 'impure' for her even to think of remarrying.

Soon after this episode, Rebekah almost dies in child-birth, and Frank experiences a pang, in a scene laden with 'you'll-be-sorry-when-she's-dead' feeling.

Rebekah stays on in the house, studing fossils and looking after her four sons and the coloured maid's child by Frank.

Bertie, Rebekah's younger sister, is beautiful, kind, good and stupid. She is seduced by a tutor when she is very young. Some years later she becomes engaged to a man she loves, and she tells him the story of the seduction. He turns from her in disgust. She leaves the farm, and stays with Rebekah. She is courted by many men. Through the activities of two mischief-makers, Mrs Drummond and the wife of her ex-fiancé, the story of her seduction becomes known, and she leaves Rebekah's house to stay with an aunt in an up-country village. The story pursues her there, and rather than go back to her family, she goes with a rich elderly Jew to London. At first she is fascinated by the luxury of her surroundings, but she soon becomes apathetic and melancholy. Taken to a threatre, she weeps wildly for the exposed limbs of the chorus-girls; given some kittens she pours out on them the love of frustrated motherhood. Her companions are Martha, the Jew's housekeeper, who hates her, and Isaac, Martha's son, a half-witted boy who adores her.

Martha contrives to have her driven out of the house, by making it appear that she is having an affair with the Jew's handsome cousin. Utterly destitute, she is befriended

-by-

by Isaac, who finds lodgings for her. He comes a little later to give her is life-time's savings, but she has gone off with the handsome cousin, whom she does not particularly like.

The story goes back to Rebekah, whose main interest in life is to find Bertie, the last news of whom was that she was in a brothel in Soho.

She meets Mr Drummond, husband of their neighbour. He has been away from home for many years. He offers to help her find Bertie, whose laugh she thinks she has heard in a Cape Town street. She and he are obviously ideally suited to one another, but their principles do not allow of an intimate relationship between them.

There the novel ends. Cronwright-Schreiner tells us that Olive had planned that Bertie should be found dying in a brothel in Simon's Town. Rebekah leaves Frank and lives at Matjesfontein with her children.

In addition to the story and the characters who act that story out, From Man to Man contains the expression of Olive's views on society, politics, art. Lyndall's expression of Olive's views on the 'woman' question, and the star's discourse to Undine on the indestructibility of matter occupy relatively little of An African Farm and Undine. Rebekah takes the Universe as her province, and her discussions with herself, her children and Mr Drummond, occupy almost one-fifth of the novel, while her letter to Frank, in which Olive expresses strongly-felt views on the man-woman relationship, occupies more than one-tenth of the novel.

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The recurrence of the painful childhood material of An African Farm and Undine has been referred to. We noted

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that Olive had not got away from it at thirty-three: at fifty-eight she expressed anxiety lest people should think the "Prelude" a "made up thing", and not "real".[1]

The two central characters are made to suffer. Rebekah is constantly humiliated by her husband's unfaithfulness, and when an ideal companionship offers she cannot accept it. She is often ill, and twice almost dies in child-birth. Bertie, hounded by society, lives and dies horribly. Minor sympathetic characters sacrifice, or attempt to sacrifice, material goods. One of these -the good Isaac- is half-witted, and loses, under circumstances most distressing to him, the object of his adoration. He has a detestable mother.

To the Hags' gallery we may add almost all the minor female characters in the book. Least objectionable of these women is the "little mother", who is kind, but stupid and inclined to whine. There is the harsh old Ayah, who seems to repent late in the story; Veronica and Mrs Drummond, agents of Bertie's suffering; Bertie's aunt and Martha, Isaac's mother, who carry on where Veronica and Mrs Drummond leave off. Our survey of the portraits of the hags in the gallery is not complete until we look at the blank walls opposite. Waldo, Lyndall and Em, Henry and Albert Blair, and Diogenes, have NO mothers. Undine's mother, actively nasty to her when she is a child, fades out of the picture when Undine is still very young; Rebekah and Bertie have a mother, but as comforter and protector she does not exist.

There is a new character, the sensual male. His appearance has been foreshadowed by Albert Blair in Undine.

-He-

1. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 1918, Letters, p. 358.

He appears in From Man to Man as the tutor who seduces Bertie and runs away, and as Frank, who makes a mockery of Rebekah's marriage. In the background of Bertie's life are thousands of shadowy creatures who consort with prostitutes.

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This is the novel on which Olive Schreiner spent some of her youth and much of her maturity and old age, and which she failed to finish to her satisfaction. If this brief account of its four-hundred and sixty pages gives the reader the impression that this is a poor novel, that impression is not far off the truth.[1] The power and the glory have not been lost in the process of condensation: they are lacking in the novel itself, only one part of which, the "Prelude", is good. Olive herself often doubted the book's worth.[2]

Nor should it be thought that Olive revised this book in a desultory fashion. Over this novel her brain, to use her own phrase, shed blood. "And what, after

-all-

1. Those of us who admire Olive Schreiner should not pretend that her geese were swans. When Vera Buchanan-Gould, in her biography of Olive Schreiner, speaks about "supremely subtle psychological truth" in connection with part of Undine, any reader of Undine may well raise a doubtful eyebrow. But what is he to make of her judgment that From Man to Man is "soul-shaking tragedy"? (Not Without Honour, p. 208). Olive's comment on George Sand was applicable, perhaps, to herself: she was greater than her work.
2. See, for example, O.S. to S.C.C.S., 25 Feb. and 23 May 1907, Letters, p. 264 and p. 268f.

all," she asks in 1886, "is my work worth that I should ...torture myself like this?"[1.]

In this year she wonders, despairingly, if the novel will ever be finished; by 1907 she is writing: "Oh, I wish I could get my book done before I die",[2.] a hope she repeats in 1909, but three years later she has apparently given up writing, and in 1913 she says: "..It isn't the pain and weakness one minds, it's the not being able to work. My one novel especially I would have liked so to finish."[3.] These references are a few of many: the later ones are marked by a sense of urgency as time passes and progress is slow.

Here was more than a wish to finish a novel. She felt compelled to go on working at it. In 1887 she writes: "..the story leads me, not I it, and I guess it's more likely to make an end of me than I am ever to make an end of it!"[4.] A year later she refers to an impulse that "drives" her on.[5.] Nineteen years later she writes: "...I know I have only tried to give expression to what was absolutely forced on me, that I have not made up one line for the sake of making it up",[6.] and in the same year: "It may not be any good; but I feel I have to do it. I used to feel I couldn't die till it was done; that fate wouldn't let it be. Now I know that anything may be; you trust and hope for years, but things never come."[7.]

This is the work of which she says: "I love it

-more-

1. O.S. to H.E., 21 May, Letters, p. [illegible].
2. O.S. to S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner, [illegible] May, ibid. p. 268.
3. O.S. to Emily Hobhouse, March, ibid. p. 321.
4. O.S. to H.E., 18 Dec., ibid. p. 125.
5. O.S. to H.E., 10 April 1888, ibid. p. 134.
6. O.S. to S.C.C.S., 25 Feb. 1907, ibid. p. 264.
7. O.S. to S.C.C.S., 23 May, ibid. p. 268f.

more than I love anything in the world, more than any place or person";[1] in which she must "say everything I want to say";[2] it is to be the justification of her life, and unless it is finished she will feel that she has wasted her life and "done nothing of good for any human creature".[3] The 'good' the novel is to do is to bring comfort to women who have suffered as Bertie and Rebekah suffer; its artistic value is of secondary importance. In this connection she said that she believed that the more she worked on her "first crude conceptions" the less they became 'art'.[4]

Her avowed object in writing the book is inconsistent with her frequent assertions that she did not write to be read, that publishing was, in fact, abhorrent to her. Of the publication of From Man to Man she wrote to Ellis: "(my desire is) to express myself, for myself and to myself alone... The thought that hundreds and thousands will read my work does affect and kindle me, not because I wish to teach them, but because, terrible as it is to show them my work at all, the thought of throwing it to them to be trodden underfoot is double desecration of it. I'm almost beginning to hate my Prelude now because three or four people have looked at it, and if many more do I shall throw it into the fire. The best stories and dreams I have had, nothing would induce me to write at all because I couldn't bear any person to read them. It's not a new development.... as a child, if Will or anyone got hold of a scrap I'd written,

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1. O.S. to H.E., 11 April, 1889, Letters, 161.
2. O.S. to H.E., 6 Nov., 1890, ibid. p. 199.
3. O.S. to S.C.C.S. 25 Feb., 1907, ibid. p. 264.
4. O.S. to H.E., 14 May 1886, ibid. p. 99.

I tore up the whole thing at once. It was like a knife in my heart today when I saw An African Farm stuck up in a window. I get to loathe it when I think how many people have read it. Do you think I could write Bertie's death-scene, do you think I could show the inmost workings of Rebekah's heart, if I realised that anyone would ever read it? If God were to put me alone on a star and say that I and the star should be burnt up at last and nothing be left, I should make stories all the time just the same... I know what I know..." [1.]

Twenty-four years later she writes: "... I think one is driven to writing; the propelling force which makes all true artists write who do not write either for wealth or fame, is the feeling that so and so only can they express their inward self, the real self that lives always in loneliness." [2.]

There is no doubt that she did write From Man to Man, as she wrote almost everything else, to express herself, for herself, and to herself alone; that she was grappling in this novel, as she had grappled in Undine and An African Farm, with the forces of her own personality. Our study of the three novels gives us some idea of what she was trying to express. We cannot dismiss the themes of the two early novels as the outpourings of unhappy youth. She did not outgrow them: they occupy her into late middle age, and are abandoned only when she abandons writing altogether. The main theme is the theme of punishment, and the offender seems to be a child.

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1. O.S. to H.E., 5 April. 1889, Letters, p. 160.
2. O.S. to S.C.C.S., 27 March. 1913, Ibid. p. 323.

I would like to say something which is, perhaps, obvious. The writer is omnipotent: within the limits imposed by the needs of his own personality he can do with his characters what he will. Olive could have comforted those frightened children, protected those tortured young women, rewarded the good old Otto. Instead she frustrated and punished them. By a fine turn of the screw she endowed them well. The girls, for example, have beauty, intelligence, character.

Even if we do not accept Olive's identification of these frustrated characters with herself, it is clear that they are very like herself, or what she imagined herself to be, and I ask the reader to accept the suggestion that she was punishing herself.

If, however, she herself was the accused, she was also prosecutor, judge, and agent of punishment.

With what offence was this wretched child charged?

It is time indeed that a counsel for the defence was admitted to this iniquitous court.

.....

Part II.

THE WOMAN

"Perhaps if I could intellectually understand
it all, it wouldn't be so hard to bear ..."

Letters.

Of her writing Clive said that the battle was all within,[1] and our study of the three novels suggests something of the nature of this conflict. But writing was only one of the ways in which she 'behavsd'. What does the rest of her behaviour suggest?

From the time we have any description at length of it, her behaviour was neurotic: she did not seem able to deal appropriately with her environment, and her behaviour did not seem to result in satisfaction of her needs.

She suffered from almost chronic depression and from attacks of acute grief, in situations which often did not call for a response of grief or depression. She frequently contemplated suicide. From about the age of seventeen she was subject to attacks of bronchial asthma, a malady closely bound up with emotional disturbances. Her relationships with people, especially with women, were on the whole unsatisfactory and very often characterized by marked hostility on her part or a feeling that she was being persecuted. Well-loved by many friends, she showed to the end of her days a craving for love. She was preoccupied with suffering, her own and that of other people. She did not seem able to shake off the events of her childhood and the feeling, engendered by that unhappy period, that she was ill-used. She herself was often puzzled by her behaviour.

The reader can decide for himself whether this description is accurate. The following extracts from her journals and letters illustrate her moods of depression. They cover a period of about forty-five years, beginning at the years of middle adolescence, and they are only a few of many expressions of these moods. At seventeen she describes herself as "anxious, miserable and distracted",[2] and a journal entry for the same -year-

1. Journal entry, quoted in Life, p. 179.
2. O.S. to Katie Findlay, 6 April, 1872, Findlay letters.

year runs: "It is all dark, dark, no hope, none, wish for nothing...waking in the morning is hell."[1] At eighteen: "I am down-down-down."[2] At nineteen: "I have not wished to die for a long time, but somehow I do today."[3] Four years later: "Do you know I get so tired sometimes I wish it were all over and yet at others there is such a clinging to life. I wish when I was two hours old the nurse had tied a garter round my neck, then I would never have known the pain of living, never have known the pain of dying..."[4] For the first three years of her first visit to England (1881-1886) she cried every night, she said.[5] At thirty she writes: "I am only by a fierce endeavour holding down all the old madness and misery and anguish that lies sleeping in my heart, ready to leap up the moment my power to hold it down goes..."[6] At thirty-one: "I wish I were dead,"[7] and at thirty-two: "I have been working in great mental agony...Sometimes I get..practically blind...and then small external things crush me."[8] In the following year she cries that she is hunted to death, and:"If it goes on a little more I will kill myself.....I've borne now for four and thirty years alone.....I will try to finish my book and then I will kill myself.....Oh, Harry, why didn't my mother put a garter round my neck the day I was born?... the hidden agony of my life no human being understands.... you are not cut off from your fellows."[9] At thirty-five she describes how, sitting reading Ruskin in the veld, she began to cry: "not quietly, but in a wild convulsed agony..." She says that she was not aware of being

-unhappy-

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1. Journal quoted in Life, p. 89.
2. Journal quoted ibid. p. 93.
3. Journal quoted ibid. p. 102.
4. O.S. to Mrs Cawood, 27 Dec. 1878, Letters, p.6.
5. O.S. to H.E., 27 Oct. 1884, ibid. p. 45.
6. O.S. to H.E., 30 June 1885, ibid. p. 75.
7. O.S. to H.E., 31 May 1886, ibid. p. 101.
8. O.S. to H.E., 27 Jan. 1888, ibid. p. 130.
9. O.S. to H.E., 18 March 1889, ibid. p. 157f.

unhappy at the time, and that it was "as if some terrible things, quite beyond the range of my conscious consciousness, were affecting me."[1] These attacks of crying, according to her husband, were common:"..she would wake up in these states," he writes. "I remember one night at Middelburg hearing her heart-rending wail, a long-sustained moan of desolation and inexpressible anguish, unconscious and uncontrolled, making one's blood almost run cold; it was the most harrowing and desolate cry I have ever heard."[2] And so the distressing revelation goes on. The Boer War had caused her the greatest misery: the Great War finds her once more cut off from her fellows, and wishing to die. She cannot write, because "there is no one left to write to."[3] "I could bear all in my personal life, if it wasn't for this exhibition of what humanity is..I have always loved humanity..: now a great cry comes into my heart: Why doesn't God take up a sponge and sop us all up.."[4] In the next year she grieves over a wasted life in which everything was against her,[5] and is suicidal once more.[6]

Her depressions were frequently accompanied by asthmatic attacks. Over and over she describes the "terrible wild agony" of the attacks, the struggle for breath, the feeling "that" you were all just nerves at their highest state of tension and that another turn and they would break. You feel you must bite your hand or knock your head till it breaks...It's a physical feeling, not mental at all, though it seems to affect the mind most."[7]

- It has.

1. O.S. to H.E., 12 June 1890, Letters, p.188f.
2. Life, p. 249.
3. O.S. to S.C.C.S., late 1914, Letters,p. 343f.
4. O.S. to H.E., 14 Dec. 1914, ibid.p.345.
5. O.S. to Mrs. Francis Smith, 1915, ibid.p.348.
6. O.S. to H.E., 30 April 1915, ibid. p. 351.
7. O.S. to H.E., 26 April 1885, ibid.p.71.

It has been pointed out that the respiratory system is influenced by the state of our emotions. "When we are frightened we 'catch our breath', and under certain other emotional circumstances we breathe deeply. A feeling of a 'weight on the chest' is a frequent symbolic representation that the patient has 'a load on his mind'... A weight on the chest is a frequent symptom accompanying the nocturnal anxiety attack. Many attacks of bronchial asthma are preceded by an anxiety dream."[1] In an article in the British Medical Journal R.D. Gillespie says that "an idea may become the affective stimulus which elicits the asthmatic response just as much as pollen or horsehair", and that 'psychological factors' can not only elicit attacks but can also act in a continuous fashion to produce a state of tension which every now and then got to a pitch of 'explosion' in a paroxysm of asthma.[2]

These statments are borne out by the investigations of Deutsch, Dunbar, Alexander, French and many others. The investigations of French suggest that "..the asthma attack is really a sort of equivalent of a cry of anxiety or rage which has been inhibited and repressed. For some reason, in the situation which produced the attack the child was unable to cry..."[3] Investigators more conservative than these also relate some cases of asthma to emotional disturbances.[4] "Psychosomatic" investigators relate asthma specifically to an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship.

The date of Olive's first asthmatic attack and the circumstances in which it occurred are not known with -any-

1. Weiss and English, Psychosomatic Medicine, p. 603.
2. Quoted ibid. p. 631.
3. Ibid. p. 633.
4. See, for example, Saviil's System of Clinical Medicine, ed. E.C. Warner, 12th edition, p. 186; Diseases of Children, ed. Donald Paterson and Alan Moncrieff, Vol. 2, 4th edition, p. 185; Textbook of Medicine, ed. Russell L. Cecil, p. 481.

any certainty,she herself giving two different accounts of it.Her husband believed one of them: that it took place somewhere between 1870 and November, 1872,after a long coach-journey during which she was exposed to damp and fatigue. On this occasion she was travelling with two older women, who, she felt, neglected her. In view of French's suggestion it is tempting to believe the other: namely,that it took place after another coach-journey in November,1875. Olive was travelling from Kimberley to Fraserburg, where she was to stay with an older sister, Alice. The journey lasted four days, she told Havelock Ellis, during which time she ate nothing because she had no money to buy food. A fellow-passenger offered her a biscuit, which she took but was unable to swallow. When she reached Alice's home,she felt herself very coolly received, and,by way of protest, rushed outside and flung herself on the ground.When she took her first mouthful of food,she experienced the "horrible agony" in the chest for the first time.[1]

Olive herself believed that her mental and physical disturbances were closely related. In 1884 she writes to Ellis: "Harry, what does make me feel like this? It's a much my mind as my body..."[2] In the same year she says that she will never have mental or physical health as long as she is dependent on anyone,[3] and in the following year she writes: "My chest is getting worse..now my legs are bad. Oh,it isn't my chest,it isn't my legs, it's I myself,my life. Where shall I go, what shall I do?"[4] She very often used metaphors of bodily processes to express states of mind. For example,she frequently complains that she is

-bleeding-

1.O.S. to H.E., 7July 1884,Letters,p.25f;pp. 90,91,94,Life.
2.5 Sept.,Letters, p.40.
3.O.S. to H.E., 24 Nov. 1884,ibid. p.46.
4.O.S. to H.E., 28 Jan. 1885. ibid. p.57.

"bleeding to death", or that her brain "sheds blood".

Her husband describes her as suspicious of people, and inclined to misunderstand them. She moved often, mostly because she felt that a change of place would relieve her asthma, but also because people "got on her nerves". She resigned from an Enfranchisement of Women Committee because she could not get on with fellow committee-members.

Her relationships with women were markedly ambivalent. At thirty-two she feels that her life is wasted for want of solitude, because a woman, "M.", wants to go where she goes.[1] She refers to "terrible experiences" she has had with various women. The burden of her complaint is that they make demands on her, ask for her help: they are "killing" her, she is "bankrupt...dying."[2] In 1887 she writes: "Perhaps this time next year I shall pass whole hours without thinking of Mrs. -. That would be heaven..."[3] In the following year she writes: "I care only that my loathing for humanity should not be increased, more especially for women"[4], and a few months later: "These women are killing me. Give my love to Louie, but I don't want to see her or any other woman. I want to live alone, alone, alone. I don't say the fault is not in myself, but they are doing it all the same. When I am in Italy I needn't open any letters they write me... I wonder if I shall ever come back to England among these women again. One must die at last.. Oh, please see that they bury me in a place where there are no women."[5] In the same year she writes: "If there be one soul you cannot love, then you're lost.."[6] and four days later: "I love Mrs. -. I'm going to begin loving everyone again."[7] In the letter in which she complains about being hunted to death, from which we

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1. Journal entry quoted in Life, p. 176.
2. O.S. to H.E., 17 and 22 March 1887, Letters, p. 111f.
3. O.S. to H.E., 25 Dec., ibid. p. 126.
4. O.S. to H.E., 5 June 1888, ibid. p. 136.
5. O.S. to H.E., 3 Oct. 1888, ibid. p. 142.
6. O.S. to H.E., 3 Nov. 1888, ibid. p. 145f.
7. O.S. to H.E., 7 Nov. 1888, ibid. p. 146.

have already quoted, she says: "I never told you the cruel things Mrs.-- said to me, when she came to see me in Londona..it was that broke me down so..."[1] The context of this statement will be discussed later. In 1910 she wrote that no biographer of hers would ever understand the "overmastering horror" she felt for some people. She said that she left England in 1889 mainly to escape one woman. "I just want.....never to remember that God made them."[2]

Throughout the periods she spent in England, she was persecuted by landladies: they swoop through the Letters like avenging furies. If it were not for her difficulties with other women, one would accept them as she describes them -old harridans, all- but as it is, one wonders. Her accounts of her difficulties with landlords and landladies during the Great War, because of her German name, are not suspect in the same way.

On the other hand, speaking of her baby sister Ellie, who died when Olive was nine, she says: "...my great love for women and girls...comes from her."[3] The women carrying on the franchise fight are "those dear women". She seems to have had some very close women friends, and of course spent much of her life and energy fighting to improve the position of women. Her apparently conflicting attitudes she attempts to explain as follows: "You would have to know how much I have loved women, and how much they are to me, to realise how some women can hurt me. It's only the things you love can really touch you and agonise you. If I didn't care for women so much, I wouldn't mind."[4]

-There-

1. O.S. to H.E., 16 March 1889, Letters, p. 158.
2. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 12 Dec. 1910, ibid. p. 297.
3. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 22 Oct. 1907, ibid. p. 274.
4. O.S. to S.C.C.S., 25 and 26 May 1907, ibid. p. 269.

There is a suggestion of some sort of difficulty in her relationships with men, too. Although she was a very attractive girl and woman, and admired by many men, she did not marry until she was nearly forty. To one of these men, Havelock Ellis, she was deeply attached for very many years. She refused to marry him, apparently because she felt some shrinking from the physical relationship.[1] "I can't marry," she cries in distress in 1886.[2] We do not know why the early love-affair with Julius Zaar, of which Vera Buchanan-Gould makes much, came to nothing - Olive refused to discuss it -[3] but it is just as likely that she put an end to it as that he did.

Her avoidance of marriage becomes significant in the light of the treatment marriage receives in the novels. The sympathetic characters either do not marry, or marry and are very unhappy. This is true not only of the central characters, Undine, Waldo, Lyndall, Rebekah and Bertie: one thinks of the governess Undine meets, prevented from marrying the man she loves; of Aunt Margaret preparing for a wedding which does not take place; of Em, married to a man who is in love with the dead Lyndall; of Drummond, whose marriage is as unhappy as Rebekah's. The stories A Policy in Favour of Protection and The Buddhist Priest's Wife, and the allegory In a Far-off Land[4] are variations on the theme of love renounced.

Together with what may be called a negative attitude to sex went a very great interest in sex-matters generally, as her published works show. She refers often

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1. See Letters, O.S. to H.E.:29 July,1884 p.36;5 Nov.1884,p.44; 18 (2nd letter) and 19 Aug.1885,p.79; and My Life by Havelock Ellis,p. 185f.
2. O.S. to H.E., 3 Jan., Letters, p.90. See also ibid.p.92f.
3. Rebekah to Katie Findlay,28 Nov.1872, Findlay letters.
4. "You will say that I make all my stories end by the ideal persons remaining unmarried," she writes to her husband of one of her stories.(Letter quoted p.244 Life.).

to a monumental sex-book, on which she said she spent many years of her life, and which she claimed had been destroyed during the Boer War. Woman and Labour represented, she said, only a fragmentary remembrance of this work.[1] On another occasion she said that she had thrown the sex-book into a short story, The Buddhist Priest's Wife.[2] In her husband's opinion the book was not destroyed: it simply did not exist.

She frequently expresses a wish to be alone, but no less often a feeling that she was alone, 'cut off' from her fellows, severed from humans and human life, 'against the stream'. One remembers Undine: "Would it be so, wherever she might go, that her hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against hers?" In political struggles she was always on the unpopular side, but this feeling of being cut off is characteristic of her from an early age.

It seems to be closely related to two things. The first is some sort of difficulty she experienced in eating in front of strangers, together with somewhat obscure allegations made about her by strangers. The other is what she called her "overwhelming" sense of sin from which she said she had been released when she read Wilhelm Meister.[3] The two are linked in the letter to Ellis from Mentone in 1889, from which we have quoted before, and which should now perhaps be given more fully. She is at her most wretched.

"You remember," she writes, "that long ago I told you how, nearly twenty years ago, when I was at Dordrecht, I had such a horror of eating before people, I couldn't, and how I used to have to eat alone, and how it kept on, and I told you what unkind untrue things they said about it. Well, there came some people here...from the Cape...or they knew

-people-

1. Woman and Labour, Introduction.
2. O.S. to W.T.Stead, undated 1890, Letters, p. 193.
3. Interview with Arthur Symons, quoted Life, p. 187.

people there, and they have been talking to all the people at the hotel about it. They are low, rough people, you know the kind I mean, and they have heaps of money. They sit and jeer at me at the table. The man with one eye calls out across the table and asks if that young lady can tell what the word pickpocket means, and then everyone laughs. Even the servants won't say "good-day" to me any more. Only one prostitute, to whom I've been kind, speaks to me .... I'm hunted to death. If I stayed here a little time longer I must die. I am going to Florence. My cough is bad and I feel so weak that it has taken me all day to think clearly enough to write this. Harry, the world isn't fair, I haven't sinned so much more than other people to be hunted down so. If it goes on a little more I will kill myself. I wouldn't if I thought my reason would stay, but I know I can't bear much more. Oh, I've been so desolate all my life, Harry, I've never had a home, I've never had anyone to take care of me like other girls have.[1] I was thrown out on the world when I was eleven, and even before that I hadn't a real home. Oh, you, who've never been turned out of a house, don't know what it is. Long ago I could bear, but now I can't any more... Oh, Harry, if you knew how helpless a woman (is). I've borne now for four and thirty years alone ... Soon the bell will ring and I must go down to that room full of human creatures. I am many years older when I come out than when I come in. I dare not stay away. Twice I have. I must seem to feel nothing ... I will try to finish my book[2] and then I will kill myself....They surely wouldn't try to hunt a human creature down if they knew what it was .. Harry,

-I've -

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1. See below pp. 38 and 51.
2. From Man to Man.

I've never willingly hurt a human being...why didn't my mother put a garter round my neck the day I was born? I am a fine genius, a celebrity, and tomorrow all these people would tread me under their feet. I can't go back to Africa, they will torture me too much. I want to go somewhere where no one knows me. It's harder than if the things were true, it's so cruel. I never told you the cruel things Mrs/ -- said to me..; it was that broke me down so.. Read my Prelude and tell me what you think of it. Harry, if I could be alone I would fi[illegible] my book, and then when it was done I could die..Everyone will say again I am wandering without a motive. I have never moved without a motive; the hidden agony of my life no human being understands. Harry, you are young and fresh; you will marry and find love; you are not cut off from your fellows. Oh, this fame is so terrible, I shrink from it so..."[1.]

Her craving for love and affection is expressed over and over again. She comments on people's kindness and unkindness to her :"I've not had an unkind word or look from anyone,"[2.] and:"Except..Will..,I've not had anyone say anything gentle to me since I left England."[3.] On the one hand this preoccupation with love, and its obverse, the avoidance of inflicting suffering is exalted into a kind of religion: "..every little bit of human love is like a precious bit of gold"[4.]; "Harry, how can I write hardly in my books when I know how all-important love and sympathy are. Life seems determined to keep impressing that on me until it spoils me as an artist. My feeling is that there is nothing in life but refraining from hurting others, and comforting those that are sad. What kind of feeling is

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1. O.S. Morse, Letters, p. 157 ff.
2. O.S. to Mrs. Cawood, 27 Dec.1878,ibid.p.6.
3. O.S. O.S. Morse, Letters, p. 157 ff.
4. O.S. 1. O.S. to Mrs. Cawood, 27 Dec.1878,ibid.p.6.
3. O.S. to H.E., 12 May 1890, ibid. p.185.

that for an artist to be narrowed down to?"[1] In 1913 she writes: "One clings to the thought that one hasn't willingly consented to (the infliction of mental or physical pain) as a drowning man clings to a straw"[2], and in the second-last year of her life:"..I know more and more certainly that nothing matters much in life but love and a great pity for our fellows. We in this world full of agony and torture and wrong have to bring into being the only God we shall ever know, by love and pity."[3] In the last year of her life she wrote: "Life is so short there is no time for anything out love."[4] In politics she was always on the side of the victim of aggression.[5]

On the other hand the need for affection is frequently associated with a desire for the comfort and protection of an all-wise, all-loving figure. "In my half-asleep state I prayed and cried. I wanted someone I didn't see to put its arms around me and comfort me and help me to bear. It's interesting how in states of greatest weakness our childish habits and thoughts come up.."[6] In the same year: "I wish I was a little child and God wrapt me up in his arms and took care of me", and: "I wish for the next six months someone would treat me like a baby and feed me and clothe me.."[7] Four years later she writes: "I was strong and well until - and - came; I now feel like a little child hardly able to creep from one room to another.. ..the beauty I seek is...all-wise, all-knowing."[8] At thirty-eight she describes how happy she was when Cronwright-Schreiner's mother embraced her. She goes on to say: "My

-mother-

1. O.S. to H.E., 4 Dec. (1st letter) 1884, Letters, p. 48.
2. O.S. to H.E., 23 March, ibid. p. 322.
3. O.S. to S.C.C.S., 26 Jan. 1919, ibid. p. 361.
4. O.S. to H.E., Jan. 1920, ibid. p. 368.
5. See below, p. 53f.
6. O.S. to H.E., 10 Jan. (2nd letter) 1885, Letters, p. 55.
7. O.S. to H.E., 17 May, ibid. p. 74.
8. O.S. to H.E., 3 Nov. 1885, ibid. p. 85.
9. O.S. to H.E., 6 July, 1889, ibid. p. 165.

mother has never been a mother to me; I have had no mother."[1.] This letter follows closely in time on a letter in which she said: "One mother better fitted to be a mother means a whole generation starting with a greater vantage in life."[2.]

It is not chance that when she is in the grip of a 'childish habit' she prays to the all-wise all-loving figure, and calls it 'God'. But it was not God, for "there is no God, in the narrow personal sense; if there were, he would be a devil; only a great terrible mystery of which we can and do know nothing. We must fight it to the end; it will beat us at length, but we must fight it as long as we can."[3.]

The figure to whom a child turns for love and protection is a mother.

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Two outsiders give a picture of Olive at fifteen, two years before she said of herself: "I am a queer mixture of good and bad,"[4.] and: "I don't hate myself quite so much as I used to..."[5.] They describe a girl "in a highly nervous state", a brilliant talker who improvises thrilling stories; a girl who paces up and down at night, laughing and crying; a girl with strong antipathies. Of this picture Cronwright-Schreiner says: "Here we see Olive, as she really was in her nervous organisation, correctly portrayed for the first time. I have no doubt that, if she could be traced, we should find-

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1. Letter to S.C.C.S., quoted Life, p. 245.
2. Letter to S.C.C.S., quoted ibid., p. 243f.
3. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 22 Oct. 1910, Letters, p. 295.
4. Journal, quoted in Life, p. 93.
5. Journal, quoted ibid., p. 98.

find the same person back to infancy; it was certainly the same person into adult years and into old age."[1.]

According to outsiders the child at six years was lively and intelligent, solitary, abnormally shy, absorbed in her own thoughts, given to almost continuous fantasy-making and frequently muttering to herself.[2.] We know, too, that she was very unhappy. The picture is that of a maladjusted child, with what seems to be a well-established personality structure.

Two inferences can be drawn. The first is that her behaviour as an adult and adolescent cannot be explained in terms of the 'external' events of the years after childhood. A broken engagement, the tyranny of one of her first employers, her contact with the squalid side of London life the Boer War and the Great War: these only modified already existing patterns of behaviour. She reacted to them as the child had reacted to the cruelty of God.

The second is that the behaviour of the child, especially her rejection of God, itself requires explanation in terms of earlier 'events'. We cannot trace her back to infancy -to use her husband's phrase- but guided by her behaviour in general and one form of her behaviour in particular -the writing of her three novels- we can attempt to draw conclusions about her earliest years and the forces active in the personality of the child.

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1. Life, p. 79.
2. Ibid. p. 64f.

Part lll.

LATENT MEANINGS

"We must see the first images which the external world casts upon the dark mirror of his mind; or must hear the first words which awaken the sleeping power of thought, and stand by his earliest efforts, if we would understand the prejudices, the habits, and the passions that will rule his life. The entire man is, so to speak, to be found in the cradle of the child."

Quoted by Olive Schreiner on a fly-leaf of
The Story of an African Farm.

"You will think that long rigmarole..inartistic.
But it bears on the story..."

Letters.

Of some of the forces at work in her childhood, Olive herself has given an account in "Times and Seasons"[1], which we can supplement from the childhoods of Waldo, Undine and Rebekah, and from descriptions by outsiders. But because the picture is detailed we should not assume that it is accurate, or, if it is accurate, that it is complete.

Olive described her childhood as bitter and dark, attributing her misery to the orthodox Christianity taught in the home.[2] "There are some of us," she wrote in her twenties, "who in after years say to Fate,'...let us never again suffer as we suffered when we were children.'"[3]

One act stands out in this unhappy childhood, and that is the child's rejection, in anguish and terror, of God. It is easy to attribute to this act the sense of sinfulness which never left her, her feeling of being 'different', 'cut off', unloved, and to relate to this rejection her lifelong horror of aggressive strength and her sympathy for the weak. It is too easy. The act itself requires some explanation.

Nothing influences the development of the child's personality more than the personalities of others, and the influence of the parents or their deputies is greater than the influence of other people. Psychologists of all schools accept these assumptions. The Schreiner children, in that home "perched....like an eagle's nest"[4], were cut off in their early years from the influence of adults other than their parents, and it seems that in that home, as in many others, the

-mother's-

1. The Story of An African Farm, part II, chap. I.
2. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 13 May 1912, Letters, p.307.
3. The Story of an African Farm, p. 34.
4. Letter quoted in Life, p. 61.

mother's influence was greater than the father's.

Gottlob Schreiner, accompanied by his wife Rebecca, was sent out to Africa by the London Missionary Society in 1837. After several moves he settled in 1854 at Wittebergen, a lonely mission-station. He was now working for the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Olive was born at Wittebergen in 1855. In 1861 the family moved to Healdtown, where Gottlob worked as missionary and head of the Wesleyan Native Training Institution. Infringing the Society's regulation that no missionary might engage in trade, Gottlob was forced to leave the service in 1865. His life of teaching, trading and amousing began. Two daughters were already married, and two sons independent. At home were Ettie (Het) aged fifteen, Olive aged about ten, and Will aged eight. These three left home in 1867 to live with Theo, a brother who was then headmaster of a school in Cradock. Theo and Het, stern disciplinarians and militant Christians, became deputy-parents to their younger brother and sister.

Gottlob failed in all his enterprises. When he set up in trade in Balfour in 1865, his arrival was hailed by his potential customers (Hottentots) as the arrival of the Redeemer, and he was bankrupt by the year's end. He was always being done down: dealers cheated him, customers did not pay. He and Rebecca, and the children when they were home, lived in great poverty, supported by the older children. The most regular contributions came from Katie Findlay, a married daughter.

His children agreed that Gottlob was very much like old Otto, of An African Farm.[1] From the Findlay letters we get a picture of a man who is old

-Otto-

1. Life, p. 21.

Otto with a difference. Otto might well have opened a school,as Gottlob did in 1871,charging pupils one-and-sixpence per month ("if they will only pay," writes Rebecca),[1] and he might have said that this was being done "not only on account of the paltry payment but on account of my heartfelt wish and desire to work more directly for our Divine Master." Otto might have gone on to describe,as Gottlob did,how he has to walk everywhere: one horse has died of poverty and cold,and the other has fallen over a high embankment.With some money Theo has sent him,he has "a poor animal,partly-paid..If I had thirty to fifty pounds' worth of goods," he goes on to say, "I might have made four to five pounds a month...If I had an erf I could have made a cottage perhaps mostly with my own hands....If I had wings to fly many times I would have liked to see you...but I have no wings and otherwise it takes a great deal of time to walk,and as we have bodies it also need provisions...I have learnt lessons.I will yet thank God for His great goodness in my poverty.."[2] But it is doubtful whether Otto would have felt the shame,resentment and bitterness that Gottlob clearly felt. One of the lessons he seems to have learnt is that "the rich have many friends but the poor are cursed."[3] In a letter to Katie in 1872 Gottlob complains that he doesn't hear from her: "True I understood that you were all along alive as you write to Mama who in return of course informs you that I am

-still-

1.Rebecca to Katie Findlay, Aug. 1871,Findlay letters.
2.Gottlob to Katie,10 Sept. 1871,ibid.
3.Ibid.

still walking.." He has been cheated by a dealer in oxen: it is "disaster and trouble upon trouble .. My faith is tried."[1] Some of the disasters were of his own making: he gave a cheque while insolvent, and he faced prosecution for selling short weight.

To the children, and our interest is in the children, he was a gentle, loving old man, submissive to the will of his beloved Saviour, and to the managing ways of his wife, Rebecca, whom he adored. If he was sometimes resentful of both of them, the children did not seem to be aware of it.

We cannot help liking Gottlob: for the improbability of his existence outside fiction, for one thing, and for his undoubted tenderness to his children, for another. He may have been idealised a little by the children and by Olive's biographers. His wife Rebecca certainly has.

Much has been made of Rebecca's fascination, and she was no doubt intelligent, cultured and charming, an oasis in Africa's aridity. Cronwright-Schreiner suggests that her personality was not a powerful one, but the tremendous impression she made on everyone who met her refutes his suggestion. It is clear too, from the Findlay letters, and from other sources, that she not only had a powerful personality, but was the dominant figure in the home. It is "mama" who hires the cottage,[2] mama who turns down a job offered to Gottlob by Katie's husband, John.[3] "The dominating personality in the family was easily Mrs. S. .,"

-writes-

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1. , Findlay letters.
2. Gottlob to Katie, 10 Sept. 1871, ibid.
3. Rebecca to Katie, ?1871, ibid.

writes a Mr Robinson, describing his first meeting with Olive in 1862.[1] He also told Cronwright-Schreiner

writes a Mr Robinson, describing his first meeting with Olive in 1862.[1] He also told Cronwright-Schreiner

that there was no "colleagueship" between Mr and Mrs Schreiner, and none between the father and the children.[2]

Vera Buchanan-Gould, a warm admirer of Rebecca, writes that many of the family found her "strict and undemonstrative".[3] Writing of Gottlob's two passions, his love for Christ and his love for his wife, Cronwright-Schreiner says: "His wife did not fully respond to his love..."[4] Olive said: "My father was infinitely tenderer to us as children and had a much greater heart than my mother. A woman loves her own little babies with a selfish animal instinct.....And, as for other people's children, are not the words stepmother and mother-in-law the two bitterest words in the world?"[5] She told Arthur Symons that her strongest desire when she was a child was that her mother should "understand" her, the realisation of which desire at the age of twelve afforded her the most "intense bliss".[6] Perhaps the "understanding" took place on the occasion when Rebecca, having read something the youthful Olive had written, knelt by Olive's bed in tears, crying: "....Oh, forgive me, please."[7]

-"Does-

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1. Letter quoted in Life, p. 85.
2. Foot-note to p. 85, ibid.
3. Not Without Honour, p. 18.
4. Life, p. 21.
5. Letter to Ellis, quoted ibid. p. 24.
6. Interview with Arthur Symons, quoted ibid. p. 186.
7. Not Without Honour, p. 182.

"Does she (Rebecca) seem glad to get Olive home I wonder-" writes one of Olive's sisters to another, of one of Olive's visits home.[1] Olive craved for affection all her life; the children in her novels are neglected and unloved; many of them are motherless.

What needeth it to sermone of it moore? It is reasonable to suppose that Rebecca was harsh and unloving to her family.

'Harsh' is not too strong a word. There is good reason to believe that, at least to the child's way of thinking, she was cruel. We have an account of two beatings given Olive, one some time before she was six. Her mother administered to her, on her bare body, fifty strokes with a bunch of quince-rods, for the grievous offence of using the Dutch exclamation "Ach!" She was beaten with equal violence some years later for disobeying an order to come out of the rain. We shall refer to these beatings again. The point is not only that Rebecca beat Olive, but that she was the sort of woman who could beat a child with such violence.[2] There is a suggestion that punishments were frequent.[3] If Rebecca was charming, her family did not experience much of her charm.[4]

There is little doubt in whose image the

-sinister-

1. Alice Hemming to Katie Findlay, (undated, ?1872). Findlay letters.
2. The child Rebekah in From Man to Man believes her mother, or the old Ayah, capable of killing a baby.
3. See Life, p.68.
4. Vera Buchanan-Gould seems to have succumbed to this charm completely. Olive at seven discovered the Sermon on the Mount. When she burst into a room, all aglow with the wonder of her discovery, her mother, according to what Olive told Cronwright-Schreiner, rebuked her "coldly". (Life, p.67.) In Vera Buchanan-Gould's version, the rebuke has become "gentle". (Not Without Honour, p. 24.)

sinister older-woman figure of the novels, and the step-mother of one of Olive's earliest stories[1], are fashioned. "My mother has never been a mother to me; I have had no mother," said Olive. But the mischief was that she did have a mother, who, unlike the mothers of Waldo, Lyndall and Em, Undine and Diogenes, Rebekah and Bertie, could not be killed off, or made to fade away.[2]

We are in relatively deep waters, and different schools of psychology chart different courses for us towards the submerged and "terrible" forces which Olive sensed "beyond the range of my conscious consciousness .." But whatever the course, the medium in which we are travelling and the goal to which we travel remain the same.

To the child, then, the mother was a powerful figure, authority-bearing and harsh. But she was also the Lord's deputy in that home perched like an eagle's nest, that home darkened by orthodox Christianity. Vera Buchanan-Gould's suggestion that the child revolted, at about the age of seven, against hypocrisy in religion as she saw it must be taken to its logical conclusion. Where did she see it, if not in that isolated home? Although the family had moved from the lonely mission-station to Healdtown, a tiny village, when Olive was six, they were still living in relative isolation.[3] Who were the "hypocritical churchmen of the day" with whom the child was supposed to have come in contact?

-It-

1. The Waxdoll and the Stepmother, the MS of which, according to Cronwright-Schreiner, is the "most carefully written and preserved" of all Olive's MSS. To the 'stepmother' theme Olive returned frequently, as we shall see.
2. Jennita in Dream Life and Real Life and the children in The Waxdoll and the Stepmother are also motherless.
3. Not Without Honour, p.24.

It is clear from the Findlay letters that Rebecca always had the word of the Lord on her tongue. Gottlob, despite the fact that he read the hair-raising sermons of Jeremy Taylor to the terrified child, did not believe in religious compulsion. The gentle old Otto does not fit the rôle of surrogate to an avenging Lord. The powerful, harsh, authority-bearing Rebecca does. We should notice in passing that Tant' Sannie, Bonaparte Blenkins, the elderly chapel-goers in Undine, and parental figures in Undine and From Man to Man, either openly or by implication, are religious in the service of the same avenging God, while most of them are cruel as well. When the gentle Aunt Margaret goes mad she becomes the devil, come to take away the souls of sinners: so engaged, she bites Undine and licks her blood-stained lips.

We noticed earlier that, when the craving to be loved is on Olive, she hungers for the all-powerful, all-loving figure and calls it 'God'.[1] In the letter in which she refers to God as a terrible mystery,[2] she describes a young man dying of heart-disease. "Such a wild curse against God came into my heart, when I saw his anguish-stricken face fighting for breath. No creature has the right to make another suffer so ..."[3] The letter is written late in life, when cursing a God in whom she no longer believed is at least an inappropriate way of behaving. There is again a confusion between 'God' and a 'creature'. Describing the "hate-making" beatings she says: "... I think they have permanently influenced my life .// They made me hate everything in the heavens

-above-

1. "..hateful damned name that it is." (O.S. to H.E., 13 July, 1884, Letters, p. 30).
2. Quoted above, p. 35.
3. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 22 Oct. 1910, Letters, p. 295.

above and in the earth beneath...It is all as vivid to me as if it had happened two hours ago, and the bitter wild fierce agony in my heart of hatred against God and man."[1]

A child beaten by its mother hates the mother, and not abstractions like "God" and "man". It would seem that the God whom the child rejected so violently and in such misery was its mother.

A child hating its mother is in an intolerable situation. In the first place, the hated mother is also the loved mother, the source -from the earliest days- of all gratifications. The child's feelings towards the mother are in conflict.[2]

In the second place, hatred of a parent is sinful in terms of the morality of the child's milieu. The child adopts the morality of his community as it is conveyed to him by his parents, usually his authority-bearing father. This morality, as Allport and others have pointed out, represents the interests and values of human beings other than the child, but "what was at first outer and perhaps alien, becomes inner and dynamic."[3] Whether we call this process "introception" as Allport does, or "introjection" as Freud does, it is clear that the child does, in some way, take into his personality at an early age the standards of right and wrong of the community: they are no longer forces outside himself but forces within him. The Freudians assert, and other suggest, that the process is not the adoption of a morality, but an identification by the child with the authority-bearing figure or figures in the home. The child, who as

-an-

1. Letter to her husband, quoted in Life, p. 250.
2. In the language of behaviorist psychology Olive's mother was an "ambivalent stimulus", i.e., a stimulus for gratification which is at the same time a stimulus for painful or thwarting experience. Behaviorists have been able to induce neurotic behaviour in experimental animals by exposing them to such ambivalent stimuli.
3. Gordon Allport, Personality, footnote to p. 217.

an infant and very young child had no standards of right and wrong, now has a conscience or super-ego. Clinical material seems to show, as Freud has pointed out, that Man's misfortune is not a deficiency of morality but an excess. The parents convey to the children the morality conveyed to them by their parents, and so on. The moral force within us are rigid: they do not seem susceptible to modification by growth and increasing knowledge.[1.]

It should be noted at this point that if the child has an ambivalent attitude towards the introjected figure, the figure with which he identifies himself, then his personality would contain within itself that which it hates or of which it disapproves. When he seeks punishment, he is simultaneously punishing himself for impulses unacceptable to the moral forces within himself, and expressing aggression towards the introjected figure. Case-histories of melancholics seem to show that the object of condemnation and depreciation in the apparently self-deprecatory attitudes of these patients is not the self, but (introjected) others. Their suicidal impulses are regarded as murderous impulses.[2.]

It is the moral forces within the child which are instrumental in some way in banishing from consciousness impulses unacceptable to them. "Everything contrary to the ruling tendencies of the conscious personality, to its wishes, longings and ideals, and everything which would disturb the good opinion one would like to have of oneself is apt to be repressed."[3.]

-'Repression'-

1. See also Gardner Murphy's remarks, p.544f, Personality.
2. See "Mourning and Melancholia" in Sigmund Freud, A General Selection., edited by John Rickman, p.142ff; Chapter X, Freud's Contribution to Psychiatry, by A.A.Brill; Chapter XXVI, Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis by Karl Abraham.
3. Quoted by Allport, Personality, p.184, from F.M. Alexander, The Medical Value of Psychoanalysis.

'Repression' implies the unconscious blocking of an impulse. Banished impulses must still be assumed to be active in the personality, and there is conflict, of a kind different from the kind previously referred to, between the impulse and the repressing forces.

Dreadful as rejection of God must have been to a small child brought up in a religious home, it was yet the lesser of what were literally two evils. The child's aggression towards the mother was redirected towards an object easily identifiable with its mother. The literature of psychology provides us with plentiful examples of 'displacement' of this kind.

The child's rejection of God must be seen as an attempt to solve one or both of the separate but related conflicts, or as a sign, a symptom, that the attempt to repress the unacceptable impulse had failed. We have written so far in vain if the reader does not at any rate accept the child's rejection of God as a symptom of a deep malaise: a distorted form of an original impulse. Such distortions are the very stuff of Olive's behaviour, and most easily recognisable in the material of her novels.

If we accept the assumption that the child incorporates into itself the authority-bearing figure in the family, then we must assume that Olive incorporated into herself the harshness and devoutness of her mother. Part of her personality would then exact the

-utmost-

1. Some psychologists would hold that the choice of God as the object of the child's aggression was 'over-determined'; in that particular home it would ensure the punishment she craved for the 'original sin', if hatred of the mother was the original sin. This punishment she no doubt received under her parents' roof; it was later meted out to her in full by Theo and Ettie. Some of Ettie's almost hysterical letters of remorse for the way she treated Olive are quoted in the Life, p.77.

utmost punishment for deviations from its rigid standards, and this would apply not only to the sinful hatred of the mother, and the later rejection of God, but to all other 'sinful' impulses of the infantile personality which knew neither right nor wrong; for example, hatred of siblings, or early 'love' impulses. Hatred of the mother was not the only impulse frowned on by the moral forces within the child, but it was a barred impulse very active in her personality.

The total personality, whose foundations are laid in the earliest relationships, does not appear to learn by experience. We do not incorporate into our personalities new experiences and knowledge: we let "our previously formed attitudes and traits suffice,"[1] and revert or regress to earlier modes of behaviour, particularly, it seems, in times of stress.

Defining "frustration" as a situation which arises when an impulse finds no outlet, and when tension therefore cannot be reduced, Gardner Murphy says: "The word (frustration) is useful in indicating not merely the attainment of a state of suspense but the irradiation through the organism of a high tension .... It is important to recognise that this spread of tension is no metaphor .. .... But to pursue more fully the long-range implications of these tension situations, is there no such thing as an enduring personality pattern related to early frustration, even when the frustrating circumstances have long since disappeared? Do not many types of nervous sufferers eat much more than they need, because as tiny children they were not adequately fed or because some other drive was frustrated? Are there not long-range compulsive -expressions

1. Gordon Allport, Personality, p. 144.

expressions which arise not from the continuation of objective outer stimulation, but from the continuation of an attitude - preserved, perhaps, by circular reflexes or by verbal cues within the self? Clinical experience strongly suggests that infantile frustration shows itself in this type of continuity ,this maintenance of an early attitude, throughout the rest of life, regardless of reconditioning factors and the patient's clear perception of the futility of such patterns."[1.]

In the language of psychoanalysis something similar to this continuity is called 'regression', and described by Berg as follows: "His (the neurotic's) libido[2.] is no longer driving him forward against the obstacles of a real world. Instead his libido has regressed backward along the intra-psychic paths of his previous mental development. Old and no longer appropriate emotional patterns are re-activated and he uses up his energy in a world of obsolete struggle."[3.]

Olive's agonising over From Man to Man for forty years, her persistent attempt to express something "absolutely forced" upon her,[4.] her continuous investment of energy and her absorption in the unhappy feelings of her childhood, are returns to just such a world of obsolete struggle. Was it the world of her earliest muttered fantasies? It was the world to which she was to return

-again-

1.Personality,p. 305f.
2."The libido is conceived of as the energy of instinctual urges for ever striving for satisfaction or relief of tension." Charles Berg,Deep Analysis,p. 21.
3.Ibid.,p.22. An evocative phrase sometimes brightens the turgid writing of the psychoanalysts!
4.It is interesting to note that she complained that characters would not do what she wished,nor An African Farm end as she wanted it to.(Life, pp. 113 and 179). Whole stories,and parts of stories,"flashed" on her fullgrown, she said. The Prelude came to her in this fashion.(O.S. to H.E.:16 July 1884,Letters,p. 32;9April 1885,ibid.p.69; O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith,Oct.1909,ibid.p.290f.).

again and again: in childhood stories like The Waxdoll and the Stepmother and The Adventures of Master Towser[1]; in Undine and in An African Farm; in the works of her maturity, not excepting the expression of her political views. And yet we are wrong to say that she returned to that world: it was a world from which she never escaped. Her intelligence and her insight availed her nothing. Circumstances changed, but she could not change with them.

It is time to reconsider her behaviour.

Olive's craving to be loved, her feeling of being unloved, was really a feeling of unworthiness to be loved because she had sinned, as well as a response to a lack of love in the home. Her need to punish characters like herself had its origin in the same sense of guilt. Nowhere is her situation dramatised more clearly than in the history of the child Diogenes, in Undine. Diogenes' mother is cruel and beats her. The mother is punished by sudden death: she dies just after she has beaten Diogenes, her crimes broad blown, as flush as May. But Diogenes is punished too, by complete paralysis. Characters in allegories who pursue ideals cannot attain them without suffering. In Olive's world there was no peace without expiation.

Olive's suicidal impulses were either impulses to self-destruction, than which there is no greater

-punishment-

1. An unlovely story for children if ever there was one!

punishment,[1] or aggressive impulses against the introjected and hated mother.

Her deep depressions and apparently unmotivated attacks of grief were partly, perhaps, reactions to the irreparable loss of the loved mother. Temperamentally disposed to perceive life as a bitter struggle, Olive was confirmed in her perception by one circumstance after another. The ruthless Lord of her imaginings took a passionately-loved baby sister from her when she was nine. For many years, from the age of ten, she knew financial insecurity. She felt herself thrown out of the house when she was twelve, and in a sense she was. The years from twelve to fifteen were spent in the unloving care of Theo and Het; from fifteen to twenty-six - productive years for her as a writer - she had to work, sometimes in uncongenial surroundings. In England and on the Continent she saw squalor and meanness and suffering. The babies of Undine and An African Farm died; her own was to die when it was sixteen hours old, and she was to nurse its body as the child Rebekah had nursed a baby's body. The England of her love died in 1899.

Her revulsion from aggression was partly, it seems, the feeling-tone of the old struggle, in which the aggressor was always a mother and the victim always a

-child-

1. In a footnote to p.545, Personality, Gardner Murphy says: "A.W.Stearns found, in 150 cases of attempted suicide, that the attempt was the end phase of a long series of progressively more and more violent attacks upon the self." One remembers how Olive felt that she had to bite her hands or knock her head during an asthmatic attack. She told her husband that when, as a child, she was "angered or worried or unjustly treated she used to get under the bed and bang her head against the wall until she was almost senseless." (Life, p.68). One remembers too how Lyndall bites her lip until it bleeds, how [illegible] deliberately crushes the thorns of a rose in her [illegible] and bruises herself by throwing herself on the stony ground.

child. If the landladies darken her letters, the step-mother or cruel mother stalks her political writings, hand upraised in aggression. In a speech on the Boer War, read to a meeting of Somerset Women, she uses the language of the old struggle.

"If a little child lay in its cradle and woke up suddenly, and saw bending over it the mother it had loved and trusted, with a knife in her hand with which she stabbed to death the little step-brother lying beside it: do you think,however long it lived, it could ever look at that hand again without seeing the knife and the blood?

"The England of our love is dead."[1.]

It was an image she had used earlier. In 1899, when it seemed that England might attack the Transvaal Republic, she wrote, in a vain attempt to stave off the disaster, An English-South African's View of the Situation.[2.] England is twice a stepmother in this pamphlet; she is once a mother to whom it must be pointed out that "the child may be coerced by force to obedience; but time passes and the child becomes a youth; the youth may be coerced, but the day comes when the youth becomes a man, and there can be no coercion then."[3.]

Of the rumours of war she writes: "There are some things the mind refuses seriously to entertain, as the man who has long loved and revered his mother would refuse to accept the assertion of the first passerby that

-there-

1. Appendix G, Letters, p. 381.
2. Pp. 15 and 94.
3. P. 17.

there was any possibility of her raising up her hand to strike his wife or destroy his child. But much repetition may at last awaken doubt ..." [1.] It may indeed.

On the next page appears this passage: "Is any position possible that could make necessary that mother and daughter must rise up in one horrible embrace, and rend, if it be possible, each other's vitals?" [2.]

In 1909 she uses the stepmother image again.

Referring to Olive's detestation of war, Cronwright-Schreiner writes: "She once said to me that when one's own people did these barbarous things, she felt as she would feel if she saw her mother drunk; the very fact that the deed was by her mother or her people made it much more terrible to her than if it were done by someone else's mother or people." [3.]

Her political attitudes always followed the pattern of antipathy to the aggressor and sympathy for the victim. The first group of victims to whom her sympathy went were women, suffering in her day from many political and legal disabilities, and she laboured mightily for their cause. When they themselves became aggressors (that is, when they used force to achieve their ends) she admired them, but was distressed. "I, myself, am opposed to all using of force personally. I, personally, would use passive resistance and argument. But I recognise this is an eccentricity on my part ....I" [4.] use of force is ever justified it is justified in fighting against social oppression ...."

-In-

1. An English-South African's View of the Situation, p. 75.
2. Closer Union, p. [illegible].
3. Life, p. 366.
4. O.S. to Mrs Francis Smith, 27 Aug. 1912, Letters, p. 316.

In a letter to Emily Hobhouse she says: "..I am much distressed about our dear,brave suffragettes in London. I feel such intense sympathy with them, but I cannot feel the letter-burning, &c., is wise or right.....it seems to me that the use of brute force and war in all its aspects are just the things we have to fight against....."[1] In a massive defence of the Boer in Thoughts on South Africa, she shows similar uneasiness at the fact that the Boer, victim of British aggression, was sometimes himself an aggressor in his relations with the native.

But when we examine some of Olive's writings more closely, we find that her reaction to aggression expressed her own aggressive impulses.[2]

Rhodes was for her the incarnation of aggressive strength, and in the decade preceding the Boer War she attacked him unceasingly, laying at his door corruption, betrayal, plunder and even murder: it was verbal aggression, but aggression none the less. The quality of the savagery of her attack on Rhodes and the Chartered Company in Trooper Peter Halkett of Mashonaland is best illustrated by the photograph she used as frontis-piece to the first edition of this book. It shows a large tree with sturdy,spreading branches. Around the trunk in a semi-circle stands a group of men, eight white men and one native. The

-white-

1. March 1913, Letters, p. 322.
2. The process which seems to have taken place is that which the psychoanalysts call 'reaction-formation'. It has been described by Gardner Murphy, who is not a psychoanalyst, as the "substitution of a divergent or compensating response in place of the raw impulse which threatens one's favorable self-portrait." (Personality, p. 551)

white men are smiling selfconsciously and a little jauntily, as men smile when they are being photographed for their loved ones. From the branches of the tree hang the bodies of three black men. Her use of the photograph, and some of the text, repels. We said that she was preoccupied with suffering: it would be more accurate to say that she was fascinated by it. We feel this in Trooper Peter. We feel it in her description of Waldo's beating, in her description of the ill-treatment meted out to the ox in An African Farm, to the dog in The Adventures of Master Towser, to the child Jannita in Dream Life and Real Life. "But Bertie is me," she cried, "and Drummond is me, and all is me, only not Veronica and Mrs. Drummond (except a little!) Sometimes I really don't know whether I am I or one of the others."[1] If Olive was Waldo, she was also Bonaparte.

Her difficulty in establishing satisfactory relationships with people, her ambivalent attitudes to women, her 'landlady' troubles,[2] all these seemed to have resulted from the child's inability to cope with its aggressive impulses towards its mother. If the psychosomatic investigators are to be believed, in this same failure lay the origin of Olive's asthma.

We have not accounted for what we called her negative attitude to sex. It will be suggested that the explanation of this was the repression of some early sexual impulse by her stern super-ego, and that

-may-

1. O.S. to H.E., 24 Jan. 1888, Letters, p. 129
2. Perhaps the counterparts of the landladies were the nuns to whose protection Olive once fled to avoid the reproaches of a rejected suitor.

may be. It is a suggestion which will not be pursued. There are nevertheless questions which must be asked, albeit in appeasement of the tormented shade of Oedipus. Why do Bertie and Undine live with men old enough to be their fathers? Why are Undine, Rebekah, Bertie, Lyndall - girls with great spiritual qualities - attracted in the first instance to lecherous men? Why is the good old Otto punished, and made to punish himself, so remorselessly? Why does the child Rebekah demonstrate over and over again a desire 'to take mother's place'?[1] The frequent association in Olive's work of sexuality and aggression is perhaps pertinent. Rebekah (of From Man to Man) explicitly associates Frank's lechery with his cruelty in field-sports. The much-married Tant' Sannie, Bonaparte Blenkins and Albert Blair are other characters who are both sensual and cruel. Trooper Peter Halkett of Mashonaland is full of references to rape and cohabitation.

Olive's difficulty in eating in front of strangers invites conjecture more compellingly. She asserted that it had cast a shadow over her life.[2] She refers to the earliest (?) manifestation of this difficulty and its recurrence in the letter to Ellis from Mentone in 1889,[3] a letter expressing tremendous

-emotional-

1. The reader who is interested in symbolism - I use the word as it is used in psychology - should examine Rebekah's fantasies, but with caution. Psychoanalysts do not always agree on the 'meaning' of symbols. Compare, for example, the interpretation of the 'wild beast' symbol on p. 133 of Introductory Lectures by Freud, with that given by J. C. Flugel in the article Theories of Psychoanalysis in Outline of Modern Knowledge, p. 564
2. O.S. to H.E., 12 July 1890, Letters, p. 191
3. Quoted above, p. 31f.

emotional disturbance. There are tenuous threads which link the difficulty to her first asthmatic attack. Her account in the letter suggests that the difficulty first manifested itself when she [illegible] fourteen, but if she was at Dordrecht, as she says she was, then she was sixteen or seventeen years old. The phrase "nearly twenty years ago" must be taken as an approximation. According to one account her first asthmatic attack took place between 1870 and 1872, most of which time she spent at Dordrecht. If the attack did not take place until she was eighteen, as the other account suggests, it is yet linked with the eating difficulty. The reader will remember that according to this account Olive had eaten no food at all during a four-day coach-journey. She had been unable to swallow a biscuit offered by a fellow-passenger, and the first mouthful of food she took after the long fast brought on the asthmatic attack. Olive herself commented on the relationship between "that convulsive feeling in the stomach and the asthma",[1] a comment echoed by the psychosomatic investigators, who point out that eating and respiration have much in common.[2]

One cannot ignore the strange mouth behaviour of Olive's characters. Margaret bites Undine, Lyndall bites herself, Undine chews and swallows the letter in which Albert jilts her, characters in allegories drink human blood and poison or wound by biting.[3] The children offer sacrifices of food to God. All the central characters and many of the minor ones give

-away-

1. O.S. to H.E., 6 Nov. 1890, Letters, p. 199.
2. Psychosomatic Medicine, p. 603f.
3. See, for example, "The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed--" and "Three Dreams in a Desert" in Dreams, and Dream Life and Real Life.

away material goods; Undine, giving away wealth, also gives away food when she is starving. Her death is as much attributable to starvation as to anything else. By behaving as they do, these characters seem to be punishing themselves or others.[1] Was Olive's refusal to eat a means of self-punishment? I do not want to push this speculation any farther, but I should like to add that if -and it is not unlikely- the origins of this difficulty lay in some infantile feeding situation, then we are back once more at the mother-child relationship.

.....

Conclusion

"I would like to have your critical judgment of my mind, or rather of my work, which is really me," wrote Olive to Ellis.[2] The woman and the work were one. Olive was what she was largely as a result of the unfortunate relationship which existed between herself and her mother from the earliest years. If the relationship had been a healthier one, she would no doubt have been a happier person. She would probably have written differently: she might have written better. She might, of course, not have written at all.

The poet is traditionally mad, or at least eccentric. Modern criticism is re-examining the traditional belief. In a volume of essays[3] Edmund

-Wilson-

1. Chapter headings describing Bonaparte's activities on the farm are: X. "He Shows His Teeth"; XI. "He Snaps"; XII. "He Bites".
2. 4 July 1884, Letters, p. 26f.
3. The Wound and the Bow.

Wilson has restated the myth of Philoctetes, who is the possessor of an infallible bow, but smitten by a noxious wound. The theme of Mr Wilson's essays seems to be that the wound is the price of the bow: that the artist's maladjustment is the source of his creative power.

We have examined the latent meanings of Olive's behaviour and her material, and suggested that she wrote in an unconscious attempt to set at rest warring impulses in her personality, to keep them -to use her own phrase- from rending her.[1] Our findings are perhaps relevant to the problem of the wound and the bow, but it is a problem which falls outside the scope of this thesis.

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1. O.S. to H.E., 23 March, 1885, Letters, p. 65.

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I should like to draw to the reader's attention two essays which have just come into my hands. They are "Freud and Literature" and "Art and Neurosis", both published in Lionel Trilling's The Liberal Imagination, London, Secker and Warburg, 1951.

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Note: I have inadvertently omitted to give numbers to the pages headed "Part I", "Part II", "Part III".

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