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EDUCATION AS PROBLEM AND SOLUTION  
IN SOME NOVELS BY  
EDITH SEARLE GROSSMANN AND OLIVE SCHREINER

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine selected novels of two contemporary feminist writers, Edith Searle Grossmann of New Zealand and Olive Schreiner of South Africa. As citizens of the British Empire they each inherited a common literary tradition and similar cultural norms. Through their writing the authors explore the inferior status of women in society, and the role played by education in reinforcing female subordination and perpetuating male hegemony. At the same time they both suggest how education can be the means for empowering women to overcome patriarchal domination. My theoretical approach has been eclectic. I have drawn freely from various schools of literary criticism -- Historical, Marxist, Feminist, Structuralist and Post-Structuralist.

Accepting the premise that Grossmann and Schreiner are themselves historical characters, their writing can be regarded as an historical product, because it represents their response to the imperatives of their age. Its subject matter, language and style are moulded by the authors' consciousness of the times. By examining the sub-text in their novels, I have tried to expose some of the contradictions and confusions which represent their subconscious response to the age, that is, evidence of the authors' own "education" and unacknowledged acceptance of patriarchal values.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is this abiding consciousness of an end to be attained, reaching beyond her personal life and individual interests, which constitutes the religious element of the Women's Movement of our day, and binds with the common bond of an impersonal enthusiasm and loyalty into one solid body the women of whatsoever race, class, and nation who are struggling towards the readjustment of woman to modern life.

Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*.

Two novelists, who were separated by thousands of kilometres, namely Edith Searle Grossmann (1863-1931) in New Zealand and Olive Schreiner (1855-1921) in South Africa, shared a common concern with the oppression of women in their societies. Both authors believed that type of education females were given reinforced their oppression and inferior status. What girls had traditionally been taught locked them into a narrow existence confined to the private world of family and domesticity, perpetually dependent on male financial and emotional support. Their education, moreover, taught them to accept this as normal. It also led to their becoming trapped in a hegemonic view so that they perceived themselves as an educationally inferior breed. However, Grossmann and Schreiner also believed that the education was also the means by which women could be liberated. Through a more meaningful education females could be taught why they needed independence and how it could be realised. In their novels Grossmann and Schreiner explore the problems caused by the way females are educated and suggest how they can be solved through education.

Grossmann and Schreiner were not the only women speaking out against the subordination of women. In many English-speaking countries there existed many individuals and groups of women who were challenging male control over their lives, especially the legal and political restrictions placed on them. The term "women's movement" is something of a "catch-all" phrase and refers to this trend among females concerned with their inferior status in society, and not to an organisation. In each country the movement manifested particular characteristics, but common to all was the demand for the immediate introduction of a more relevant and worthwhile education for females - an education which would enable them to live as autonomous adults in their own right and not merely in the supporting and subordinate roles of wives, sisters and daughters, which they had traditionally occupied.

It should be noted that their concern was selective and not for women of all races and classes. This élitism I will discuss in Chapter Five.

Progress for such a nebulous and disunited movement was slow. It had to contend with powerful religious, economic and political arguments propounded by the well organised, highly articulate forces of the male establishment. Another obstacle, which was perhaps greater because it operated insidiously, came in the form of women who, for different reasons, were quite happy with the *status quo*, and who resented any suggestion that society should be organised differently. All these groups of people considered that educating women would undermine the whole moral structure of society. The main impediment to progress was undoubtedly the apathy of most women, and it was in this respect that women's literature fulfilled a vital role in raising the consciousness of women about their status in society.

Both countries were colonies of the British Empire and were populated by thousands of immigrants and indigenous peoples. During the nineteenth century most of the immigrants originated from Europe. In New Zealand and Australia British settlers predominated. The European population of South Africa comprised the Boers, whose ancestors had first arrived from Holland and France in the 17th century, and the British whose colonising dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Together with their personal belongings the colonists imported their culture, their moral values and their prejudices. In their new homes they tried to recreate society according to the beliefs and customs which existed back in the mother country. Consequently patriarchal structures flourished; society was organised and controlled by males who dominated women in all matters -- domestic, educational, sexual, public, legal, political and religious. In his thesis, in which he compares *AF* with Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, Garth Green observes

As these new societies evolved in response to historical conditions, so would a new literature, which was also an agent in, and a product of, this evolution. The tensions of the evolving societies would be reflected in its literature.<sup>2</sup>

These "tensions" are the areas which I examine in my thesis. The examination is two-fold. My main concern is the type of education portrayed in the novels, as it reflects the attitudes to women in relation to men in Australia and South Africa in the late nineteenth century.

The second part of my research involves the sub-text, that is what the authors unknowingly reveal about themselves by their choice of language and imagery and by the "unwritten", that is the gaps and omissions in their text. Grossmann and Schreiner are themselves historical subjects and are 'imprisoned by the consciousness of their times'.<sup>3</sup>

They too are caught up in the processes they are attempting to depict and are moulded by the same patterns and forces they are trying to assess.<sup>4</sup> Hence their writing is also an historical product of these same times. Running through each novel is a sub-text, which is the author's subconscious response to her own education. I will be examining this sub-text for evidence of the way Grossmann and Schreiner accidentally betray themselves in relation to their feminism and didactic intentions, so much so, that they often appear to be condoning at the same time as they condemn. Having inherited a common literary and cultural heritage, they inevitably make similar *faux-pas*, as well as exhibiting their own particular biases.

The novels I will be examining are *In Revolt* (1893) and *Hermione: A Knight of the Holy Ghost* (1907) by Edith Searle Grossmann, hereafter to be referred to as *IR* and *HKHG*; and *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *From Man to Man* (1926), hereafter to be referred to as *AF* and *FMTM*. The first three novels are set between the 1860s and 1870s. In Grossmann's novels the action takes place mostly in Australia, with a few chapters set in Europe and the United States. The events of *AF* all occur in South Africa and in *FMTM* the characters live in the Cape Colony and London. No definite dates are given in *FMTM*, but it seems likely that the events take place towards the end of the 19th century.

For the purposes of this thesis the word "education" is used in its broadest sense to encompass the different types of processes involved in the imparting and reception of knowledge and skills. Each chapter investigates a particular aspect of education; firstly in regard to what the authors chose to tell us, and secondly, the sub-text, that is, what their choice, and the style in which they present it, tells us about themselves.

In Chapter One I review the authors' own educational background, their commitment to the women's movement and some aspects of their professional career as writers. Chapter Two is about the early education which is received at home. In Chapter Three I consider secondary and tertiary education, and the relative values attached to intellectual ability versus domestic creativity. Chapter Four is about gender conditioning as an aspect of women's education. In Chapter Five I investigate the transmission of cultural values and ideas, including the indoctrination of some of the "unwritten rules of society". In the final chapter I consider education as the solution to women's subordination in society, how raising the consciousness of women about their oppression can help bring about change.

Changing the *status quo* and informing women about inferior position in society are Grossmann's aims in writing *HKHG*. In this novel she presents her theories about women's rights through the medium of fiction in order to disseminate them and, hopefully, gain converts to the cause. A short note preceding the title page of the first edition of *HKHG*, initially called *A Knight of the Holy Ghost*, leaves us no room to doubt the author's didactic intention:

The following narrative is based on a study from the past, before the Woman Movement had raised the condition of women; and it is produced now in view of the a strong reactionary tendency towards re-subjection.

Like Grossmann, Schreiner believes in the power of the written word to bring about change. With *FMTM* her conscious purpose is to teach in order to change behaviour, akin to Sidney's idea that a poet's moral obligation is to delight and teach. In a letter to Havelock Ellis in 1884, she declares:

I have always built upon the fact that *FMTM* will help other people, for it will help to make men more tender to women, because they will understand them better; it will make some women more tender to others; it will comfort some women by showing them that others have felt as they do.<sup>5</sup>

There is of course an underlying assumption here which campaigners of many causes make, the assumption that knowledge will lead to instant conversion, which will be immediately translated into action. The relationship between the novel and society is at all times a dialectic, and one with which novelists have often been engaged, often with the aim of trying to effect change and influence future developments.<sup>6</sup> Ever since the seventeenth century there have been women who have written about the limited lives they were forced to lead and the roles which the patriarchy conditioned them to play. Several poets single out the inferior education females were given as being a prime factor of this conditioning. A brief review of female protest fiction written by women prior to Grossmann and Schreiner will illustrate the literary tradition in which these novels can be placed.

Sarah Egerton (1669 - 1722) discusses the type of education which she, as a female, received in her poem "The Liberty". The effect of this education, she claims, was to circumscribe her existence as an adult and condemn her to a life of 'Foolish, dull Trifling, Formality.' A contemporary of Egerton's, Ann Finch (1661 - 1720), suggests in "The Introduction" that women are 'education's, more than natures's fools'.<sup>7</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft takes up this theme in her 1792 "Vindication of the Rights of Women" in which she argues that women are deliberately kept ignorant 'under the specious name of innocence.' Wollstonecraft sees education as enabling 'the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it<sup>8</sup> independent. She is implying that women are

denied the opportunity to become virtuous and independent because they have no access to academic learning and *vice versa*.

The tradition of female protest literature was modified during the nineteenth century when the female *Bildungsroman* became the most popular genre for exploring the position of women in society. A *Bildungsroman* is an "education" novel, i.e. education in its broadest sense, in which the author traces the personal, intellectual and spiritual development of a protagonist, e.g. Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. In her article about the female *Bildungsroman* in Commonwealth literature<sup>9</sup> Margaret Butcher suggests that Maggie Tulliver, who desperately wants to attend school like her brother and learn Latin and Greek all of which is denied her as a female, is a precursor of such women characters in novels of the *Bildungsroman* genre. According to Butcher, women authors throughout the British Empire writing from 'a shared colonial perspective' increasingly used the genre. They did much to highlight women's lives and to raise consciousness about contemporary issues. In fact, during the nineteenth century women writers attained a hitherto unprecedented recognition and popularity. This not only helped to promote the women's movement, but also to popularise it. The novels of Edith Searle Grossmann and Olive Schreiner belong to the *Bildungsroman* tradition and are part of this body of women's literature, written from 'a shared colonial perspective'.

## END NOTES

1. The dates when British immigrants settled in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia vary. In Australia British convicts and free settlers first arrived in 1788. Significant immigration from the United Kingdom started after the second British Occupation of the Cape Colony, the first area of South Africa to be colonised, in 1806. Systematic colonisation of New Zealand began under the Wakefield Settlement Plan during the 1840s.
2. Garth Green, *Aspects of the Colonial Novel: The Background and Context of Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm and Miles Franklin's My Brilliant Career as Representatives of South African and Australian Literature*. MA (English ) thesis. (Johannesburg: Rand Afrikaans University, 1982).
3. Nadine Gordimer in the Foreword to Ruth First & Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner: A Biography* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p.6.
4. Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p.2.
5. S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner (Editor), *The Letters of Olive Schreiner: 1876-1920* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1924). Hyperion reprint edition 1976. p.29.
6. I am indebted to Dr Russell Poole for this point.
7. The idea to include this information arose from a discussion with Dr John Muirhead.
8. It is interesting to note how she avoids the gender specific pronoun.
9. Margaret K. Butcher, "From *Maurice Quest* to *Martha Quest*: The Emergence of the Female *bildungsroman* in Commonwealth Literature". In *World Literature Written in English*, Guelph, vol.21, no.2, 1982.

## CHAPTER ONE

She was from the first a militant feminist.

"Edith Searle Grossmann -- Pioneer", Alan Mulgan.

In this chapter the authors are the focus of attention. How they behaved and what they accomplished, is more fascinating than those of their characters, because they illustrate genuine, as opposed to fictional, responses to the imperatives of their age and to the women's movement. The act of writing itself represents a positive attempt to become involved in the *Zeitgeist* and to achieve personal fulfilment, not just vicarious success through the lives of the protagonists.

As contemporary writers and emerging from kindred societies, the lives of Grossmann and Schreiner not unnaturally followed a similar pattern. Born eight years apart, one in Australia and the other in South Africa both women grew up as first generation immigrants in colonial societies which were strongly influenced by imported British values, more so than colonies like India or the West Indies. Each became an avid reader at an early age and possessed a retentive memory. In their adolescence they both experienced major upheavals, Schreiner with the break up of the family home, and Grossmann when her family immigrated to New Zealand. As young women they demanded more for themselves than marriage, and after some years teaching, they eventually achieved careers as professional writers. They both left their own countries and spent some years in Britain and Europe. When they married, both women retained their maiden names, which was highly unusual in the nineteenth century. Neither of them had the traditional Victorian or Edwardian marriage with umpteen pregnancies, and within a year they

both resumed their careers as writers. Grossmann became a professional journalist, whilst Schreiner's writing became more diversified with political tracts and short stories, as well as newspaper articles. commenting on current affairs. Their marriages were not happy, and, during the last few years of their lives they both lived apart from their husbands as single women.

Let us consider how each author was educated and how she became a feminist.

#### EDITH SEARLE GROSSMANN'S EDUCATION

Edith Howitt Searle was born at Beechworth in Victoria (Australia) on 8 September 1863 into an English immigrant family. Her parents, Mary Anne and journalist, George Searle, were both 40 when their fourth child was born. In 1878 the family moved to Invercargill in New Zealand where Edith attended the local Grammar school. Her education to date had made her 'an untaught girl, with only a good deal of miscellaneous reading to fall back on.'<sup>1</sup> The following year she enrolled at Christchurch Girls' High for a year's 'finishing'.<sup>2</sup> At first she had no inclination for further study, but whilst there, she had the good fortune to be taught by Helen Connan (later Macmillan Brown), the first woman in the British Empire to be awarded an Honours Degree. Helen Connan's example inspired Edith and the extra tuition which Helen gave her pupil enabled Grossmann to secure a Junior University Scholarship. She began her BA course at Canterbury College in 1880. Professor John Macmillan Brown, who later became Helen Connan's husband, recalls the 'splendid work Edith did in (his) classes', her imaginative and philosophical bent' and the enthusiasm and passion with which she entered into 'all societies and discussions with her fellow students.'<sup>3</sup>

Academically she did very well, and in 1882, won several prizes, including the Bowen Prize for an essay on "The probable effect of geographical and other physical conditions on the future development of the Colony of New Zealand", and a University Senior Scholarship. In 1884 she was awarded a BA, and in 1885 an MA with first class honours in Latin and English. in 1885.

W.J. Gardener offers an interesting insight into the early days of Canterbury College. He refers to the 'considerable cost in physical and nervous energy' by which 'women won their university careers ... especially under Macmillan Brown's "gospel of work".'<sup>4</sup> He writes with pride about the larger proportion of women students at Canterbury College which had more 'than any other coeducational institution in the world' during the early 1880s. In her 1923 article for "The Lyttleton Times" Grossmann conveys the tremendous sense of being pioneers which many of the women students felt. It was during her university days that Grossmann's feminist views really developed.

The BA degree course which the students studied then was very much more general than it is now, with 'more emphasis on breadth than on depth of studies'.<sup>5</sup> Its main aim was a strictly colonial one: 'to train the next generation of New Zealand teachers, who would have to turn their hands... to almost any subject demanded of them.' The subjects taught at Canterbury College in 1880 were: classics, English Literature, history, mathematics, chemistry, physics, geology, biology (botany and zoology), French and German. Grossmann is likely to have acquired knowledge of all of these subjects and demonstrates it regularly in her novels, with epigrams, allusions, poetry extracts etc. This polymath approach to scholarship was very demanding, as Grossmann recalls:

Since medieval days, there have not often been students more tremendously in earnest over their studies; but the best things we learnt were how to learn anything set before us, and how to work hard at everything.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to her academic studies she was a member of the Dialectic Society and took part in their plays and debates. Her last debate, she remembers, was in 1884 on the Married Women's Property Bill. Parliament passed the Bill, but in Canterbury College Dialectic Society, she recalls in her article,

most of the young men voted against reform, chivalrously declaring that it would degrade such poetic beings as we were to have any possessions of our own.

The ideals and theories of the women's movement were integral to the educational and cultural life of female students in the 1880s. The suffrage campaign and the demands for educational opportunities were very much part of the *Zeitgeist* in New Zealand. It would, indeed, have been strange if Grossmann had not become a feminist and pioneer for women's rights, given the political climate during 1880s and 1890s and her personal involvement in female education.

After graduating she took a teaching post at Wellington Girls' High School where she stayed until 1890 when she married Joseph Penfound Grossmann, a fellow student who had graduated from Canterbury with triple honours in English, Latin and Political Science. Like Schreiner, Grossmann retained her maiden name when she married and was thereafter known as Edith Searle Grossmann. A century later many women will readily accord with the importance of this gesture as a symbol of a woman's individuality and independence as a human

being. Olive Schreiner not only kept her own name but persuaded her husband to incorporate it in his name.

Grossmann's commitment to the women's movement was translated into action in 1892, when she and her husband became founding members of the Canterbury Women's Institute. This organisation was devoted to all aspects of the emancipation of women and not just the franchise. Patricia Grimshaw writes:

The Canterbury Women's Institute in many way reproduced the work done by the feminist branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union with the two sexes working together, but with the temperance and Christian basis removed.<sup>7</sup>

Grossmann's only child was born in 1894 and apparently he was mentally retarded.<sup>8</sup> Her husband taught at Christchurch Boys' High School and also lectured at Canterbury College during this period until 1898, when he was prosecuted for forgery and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Shortly afterwards Grossmann started a new career.

Like her father she became a journalist and started writing articles for magazines and journals. This involved her in overseas travel, primarily in Britain and Europe. Patrick Evans discusses the difficulties which colonial female writers, including Grossmann, encountered trying to enter the British literary scene at this time. He suggests they were 'doubly disadvantaged, by gender as well as by colonial status.'<sup>9</sup> Apparently they formed a 'New Zealand Circle' at the London Lyceum Club, the same Club which Schreiner sometimes visited, and in 1903 a women's club called the Austral was started. Evans continues:

It was here, curiously, in a ghetto at the indifferent heart of empire, that many women writers in particular found the easiest place to write in.

Despite her career change Grossmann's concern with education, especially girls', continued, as subsequent writing reflects. As well the 1905 *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown* and the 1907 *Hermione* novel, she also wrote articles about it, such as: "The Native School of New Zealand" which was published in *The New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* in 1903, and "Old Saint John's College - Plea for its Preservation", published in *The Auckland Star* in 1919.<sup>10</sup>

#### OLIVE SCHREINER'S EDUCATION

Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner was born on 24 March 1855, at the Wittebergen Mission Station in the remote Karoo area of the Eastern Cape Colony bordering on Basutholand. She was the ninth child of Rebecca Lyndall and Gottlob Schreiner and was named in memory of three dead brothers. Until the age of eleven she was taught at home by her mother, herself an accomplished linguist, raconteur, musician and letter writer. Rebecca's duties as a missionary's wife and the mother of a large family living in an isolated rural community left her little time for teaching her children more than the basic skills of reading and writing. In her daughter Olive she recognised a lively, inquiring mind, a retentive memory and a talent for inventing stories, and these traits she encouraged. Stories of the seven year old Schreiner's precocious ability to recite the poetry of Coleridge, Tennyson and Milton are legion.

During these years the Bible exerted a strong influence on the development of her mind. As the daughter of evangelical missionaries she was reared to regard the Scriptures as the ultimate authority on all matters of

spiritual belief. Stern discipline, strict rules regarding behaviour and absolute obedience to elders were the Calvinist type of lessons instilled in the family. The Bible, the archetypal patriarchal document, exerted a tremendous influence on her childhood. The exploits of the Old Testament heroes enthralled her, while the New Testament Sermon on the Mount inspired her. Although she had rejected formal Christianity by the time she reached adolescence, the language of the Bible continued to excite her and she committed long passages to memory. The influence of the Bible on Schreiner's literary style has been researched by several scholars, including A.E. Voss and Riccardo Duranti.<sup>11</sup> As a child she was often described as *koppig*<sup>12</sup>, which suggests that her propensity to rebel against oppression was innate.

When Schreiner was ten her father was dismissed from the Wesleyan Missionary Society. His subsequent inability to provide for wife and children led to the break up of the family. The two elder Schreiner boys had been sent to England for a formal education at the Wesleyan College in England. Now Theo returned and offered to help his impoverished parents with his younger siblings. In 1867 Olive and her younger brother, Will, went to live with Theo and an elder sister. Theo ran a small school in Cradock, and for a few brief years Olive had access to a more structured form of tuition.

Her first biographer and husband, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner reproduces the timetable she proposed for herself, as recorded in her journal for January 1869. It involves an hour each day for French, German, Music, Latin, Drawing, Painting and 'Study with Theo'. Two hours each day were allocated to Mathematics and Reading, and three hours to Writing. How far this ambitious timetable of study (fifteen hours per day) was adhered to is not known. Her husband certainly writes very scathingly about Schreiner's academic ability, maintaining that she learned 'practically nothing of

all these studies'. He suggests that this is 'what one might expect of her unusual mind, which learnt by reading and thought and not mechanically.'<sup>13</sup>

In later years Schreiner always claimed that 'she received no education other than that which her mother was able to give her.'<sup>14</sup> This claim perhaps owes more to the natural pride of a successful autodidact than reality. What we can assume, I think, is that the formal education she did receive between the ages of twelve and fifteen was extremely haphazard. The informal education she received during this period, almost totally through reading, was considerable. During her three years in Cradock Schreiner was a member of the Public Library, which was surprisingly well stocked 'with some of the best and latest publications of the day.'<sup>15</sup>

Reading became an increasingly important feature of her life and from 1870 onwards her most important (and often only) means of acquiring knowledge. Denied the opportunity to receive further schooling, and forced by family circumstances to live on lonely farms where she earned her living as a governess, Schreiner embarked on a programme of self-education. She read whatever she could get hold of: books which circulated from Cradock Library, books she could borrow from friends and a few which she was able to buy. Apart from a few works of fiction by Dickens, the Brontës and George Sand, she read works of theology, science, history, medicine, anthropology and political philosophy. By the time she was twenty she had read, and assimilated, many of the works of Plato, John Stuart Mill, Darwin, Huxley, Emerson, Ruskin, the historians Buckle, Carlyle, Gibbon, Liddle and Lecky, and the plays and poetry of Shakespeare, Goethe, Shelley, Schiller, Goethe and Heine.

The author whose work influenced her most during this period was undoubtedly Herbert Spencer, who wrote *First Principles*. The romantic story of how she was given the book

to read by a chance encounter with Willie Bertram, on whom Waldo's *Stranger in AF* is modelled, is well documented. Ever since the death of her nine year old sister, she had been plagued by religious doubt about which she had been misunderstood and reviled within her family. Spencer's evolutionary philosophy both reassured and inspired her. In a letter to her life-long friend, the pioneering sexologist and man of letters, Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), she wrote, 'I always think what when Christianity burst on the dark Roman world it was what that book was to me.'<sup>16</sup>

Throughout her life Schreiner continued with her informal education and this mainly through reading. Indeed in all her novels she uses books and reading habits, or lack thereof, as powerful literary motifs. During her first sojourn in England (1881-89) she was urged 'to view her desire for self-development as a moral imperative.'<sup>17</sup> To this end she attended lectures and parliamentary debates and regularly visited the British Museum for research purposes. In fact her account of Rebekah's autodidacticism -- reading, research, investigation, study and writing -- parallels the author's own efforts at self-development. Much of Schreiner's writing, especially in *FMTM*, is autobiographical. In a letter to Havelock Ellis in 1888 she writes

Rebekah is me, I don't know which is which any more. But Bertie is me, and Drummond is me, and all is me, only not Veronica and Mrs Drummond (except a little!)<sup>18</sup>

The scope of Schreiner's education was indirectly broadened by her friendship with the Boers among whom she lived during her years as a governess (1873-81). She became a fluent Afrikaans speaker and gained an insight into a different set of cultural norms. The Boers' way of life was more relaxed and geared to the natural rhythms of the environment than was the rigidly enforced strict English,

middle-class behaviour which governed the life in Rebecca Schreiner's household. Such an atmosphere had a liberating effect on Schreiner, and gave her a measure of financial independence and a sense of self-worth. It was during these years that she wrote *Undine* and *AF* and began *FMTM*. Lucy Nuttall<sup>19</sup> suggests that as a governess she achieved Virginia Woolf's ambition, 'A Room of One's Own'.

A childhood ambition to become a medical doctor now seemed more attainable. Her friendship with John and Mary Brown was a decisive influence in this regard. Since no medical school in South Africa, or in any other British Colony would admit women during the 1870s, Schreiner and the Browns formulated what she termed 'the English plan' to enable her to travel to England and enter medical school. She reached Britain in 1881, and, having failed to gain entrance to Medical School, enrolled for nursing training at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. The cold, damp climate aggravated her asthma and she had to leave. Bad health precluded her ever realising her medical ambitions. Her interest in medical and scientific studies found expression through her fiction in Rebekah's activities. In her will she made provision for the establishment of a medical scholarship for women at the South African College (forerunner of the University of Cape Town) 'to be administered emphatically without reference to race, colour, or religion, with poor women and girls accorded preference.'<sup>20</sup>

The development of Schreiner's feminism seems to have been spontaneous, an instinctive reaction to the *Zeitgeist*. When she wrote *AF*, 'she had no contact with a feminist movement of the kind then active in England and pressing for women's access to higher education and the professions.'<sup>21</sup> To date her reading had included few novelists. The genesis of her feminist theories seems as unexplained as Lyndall's. Her ideas on the position of women as articulated by Lyndall, whom Elaine Showalter describes as 'the first wholly serious

feminist heroine in the English novel'<sup>22</sup> can only have originated from her own experience of life, and from witnessing the way women in the Colony seemed to be second class citizens, lacking economic, social, intellectual and even physical control over their own lives.

Over the years the authors became more radically committed to the cause women's rights. During the intervening years - that is between the writing of *IR* and *HKHG* (fourteen years) and *AF* and *FMTM*<sup>23</sup> - both Grossmann and Schreiner came into close contact with suffrage groups in Britain and in their own countries. Such contacts fuelled their innate feminism and helped in the formulation of their theories about improving the position of women in society. Many of Schreiner's ideas are incorporated in her sociological treatise - *Women and Labour*, which 'became a central text of the women's movement during the first decades of the century.'<sup>24</sup>

Grossmann's involvement with feminist issues continued when she became a journalist and author. An article, entitled "Women of New Zealand", which she wrote for *The Empire Review* in 1906, illustrates this. Analyzing the 'indirect social influence' which the franchise had on the country, she notes how it had 'helped to raise the general position of women, while increasing at the same time their sense of responsibility and their self-respect.' A contemporary review of the novel extols its worth 'as an exposition of the woman question as it appeared in the last century'<sup>25</sup>.

From these summaries we can, determine the depth of the authors' commitment to feminism, which was, I believe, the dominant feature of their work. Despite the differences in their backgrounds -- Grossmann came from metropolitan Victoria and New Zealand, where English-speakers predominated, and Schreiner from rural Africa, where English-speakers were well outnumbered by the black indigenous

population and Afrikaners -- the two writers reached similar conclusions about the nature and source of women's oppression. Both recognised the fact that the type of education females received reinforced and perpetuated male hegemony, resulting in their subordination. At the same time, Grossmann and Schreiner believed that education was the means for changing the situation and displacing the male hegemonic world view.

## END NOTES

1. Edith Searle Grossmann, *The Life of Helen Macmillan Brown* (Christchurch: published on behalf of Christchurch Girls' High School Old Girls' Association, 1905), p.40.
  2. *ibid*, p.39.
  3. This is taken from John Macmillan Brown's 1931 obituary for Grossmann in the Christchurch Press, entitled "Edith Searle Grossmann - A Pioneer on Women's Education".
  4. W.J. Gardener *et al*, *A History of the University of Canterbury: 1873-1973* (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1973), p.157.
  5. Gardener, p.96.
  6. Edith Searle Grossmann, "Student Life in the Eighties", The Lyttleton Times, Saturday, May 12, 1923.
  7. Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* (New Zealand: Auckland University Press, 1972), p.51.
  8. Aorewa McLeod, "Edith Searle Grossmann: 1863-1931". In *The Book of New Zealand Women*, Edited by Charlotte Macdonald *et al* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 1991), p.263.
  9. Patrick Evans, *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990), p.36.
  10. I am indebted to Anthony Morgan for this information from his 1976 MA History thesis, *Edith Searle Grossmann and the Subjection of Women* (University of Auckland, 1976).
  11. A.E. Voss, "'Not a Word or a Sound in the World about Him that is not Modifying Him': Learning, Lore and Language in *The Story of an African Farm*". In *Olive Schreiner*. Edited by Cherry Clayton (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983), pp. 170-181.
  - Riccardo Duranti, "Voices Crying in the Wilderness: Lies and Prophecies". In *The Flawed Diamond*. Edited by Itala Vivan (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1991), pp. 74-83.
  12. I intend to use the word "Afrikaans", rather than "Cape Dutch" to refer to the language spoken by the Boers during the 1870s onwards, and cite as authority the work of Rev. Stephanus du Toit with his (1876) *Die Geskiedenis van Ons Land in die Taal van Ons Volk* and as editor of Die Afrikaanse Patriot from 1876-78. This information is taken from *The Concise Illustrated South African Encyclopaedia*. Edited by Peter Schirmer (Johannesburg: Central News Agency (Pty) Ltd, 1981), p.45.
- Koppig* is an Afrikaans word which means obstinate and pigheaded.

13. S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Life of Olive Schreiner* (London: Unwin, 1924), pp.7-3.
14. Vera Buchanan-Gould, *Not Without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), p.21.
15. Vera Buchanan-Gould, p.32.
16. Richard Rive, Editor, *Olive Schreiner Letters: Volume 1: 1871-1899* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.36.
17. Berkman, *The Healing Imagination*, p.27.
18. S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner, Editor, *The Letters of Olive Schreiner: 1876-1920* (London: Unwin Ltd, 1924), p.129.
19. Lucy Nuttall, "A Sketch of the Life and Works of Olive Schreiner". In *The Silver Plume*. Edited by Neville Nuttall. (Pietermaritzburg: APB Publishers, 1956), pp.i-x.
20. Joyce Avrech Berkman, *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner: Beyond South African Colonialism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p.40.
21. First and Scott, p.15.
22. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), p.199.
23. According to Cronwright-Schreiner she began writing *FMTM* in Kimberley in 1873, under the title *Other Men's Sins* and worked on it intermittently throughout her life.
24. First & Scott, p.15.
25. This is from the *Christian Commonwealth* and is quoted in "Some Press Opinions of the First Edition of the Novel" which are printed in *HKHG*, Second Edition.