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BIOGRAPHY AND THE WRITING SUBJECT

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CONTENTS

Preface		iii
Chapter One	The Subject of Biography	1
Chapter Two	Samuel Cron Cronwright-Schreiner: The Subject as Other	27
Chapter Three	Johannes Meintjes: The Anxiety of Castration	48
Chapter Four	Johannes Székely: Life and Work	70
Chapter Five	Helmut Fritz: The Female Subject	96
Conclusion		120
Works Consulted		125

PREFACE

This thesis examines four biographers' methods of representing the lives of two women: Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), who spent her life in South Africa and England, and Franziska zu Reventlow (1871-1918), who lived in Germany and Switzerland. The subjects of these biographies never met and it is unlikely that they ever read each other's work. Olive Schreiner's father was German, but her knowledge of the German language was limited. Although Franziska zu Reventlow translated many novels from French and Norwegian into German she never learnt English. Yet, living in Western cultures during the same period, their lives display a remarkable number of similarities. Both women were writers of fiction who made considerable sacrifices in order to pursue their chosen profession. In comparison to most of their female contemporaries they insisted on living unconventional lives which manifested their subversive views, particularly with regard to women's sexuality and women's rights. Unable to accept traditional definitions of women, they were forced to live unsettled lives, frequently changing their places of residence. Because neither was able or willing to accept permanent positions, each had to rely periodically on friends and relations for financial support, despite repeated attempts to attain independence. Both women suffered from physical disorders which many of their biographers consider to have been psychosomatic (neither illness had been definitively diagnosed in modern medical terms). In an assertion of their independence, Olive Schreiner and Franziska zu Reventlow chose to retain their unmarried names after their marriage (or in the latter's case, marriages).

In the last two decades German and English speaking communities have witnessed an increasing interest in the lives and works of fin de siècle women writers. Franziska zu Reventlow's and Olive Schreiner's writing, which had been neglected for a large part of this century, has been republished in recent years, and each writer has consequently become the subject of several biographies and biographical essays.

Since Olive Schreiner's death five full-length biographies and many biographical essays have been written in English alone. Franziska zu Reventlow's life and work has been discussed in two full-length German language biographies and several biographical essays. Three of Olive Schreiner's biographies were written by women and two by men: The Life of Olive Schreiner (1924), by S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner; Not Without Honour. The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner (1948), by Vera Buchanan-Gould; Olive Schreiner. Her Friends and Times (1955), by Daisy L. Hobman; Olive Schreiner. Portrait of a South African Woman (1965), by Johannes Meintjes; and Olive Schreiner (1980), by Ruth First and Ann Scott. Franziska zu Reventlow's biographies were both written by men: Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow. Leben und Werk (1979), by Johannes Székely; and Die erotische Rebellion. Das Leben der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow (1980), by Helmut Fritz. I shall discuss the four biographies written by men.

Although the contents of the biographies are comparable, their forms are discrete. Cronwright-Schreiner's Life, which is over 400 pages long, is paradigmatic of a late Victorian historical narrative. This biographer presents his material in the form of a comprehensive realist text, accumulating facts and data, and reproducing extensive quotations from Olive Schreiner's own writing and from eyewitness reports. Meintjes's text is less than half as long as Cronwright-Schreiner's, and it adopts more obviously the conventions of a novel. Meintjes uses few direct quotations, paraphrasing extracts from Cronwright-Schreiner's biography in colloquial language.

Székely's biography comprises a detailed literary analysis of his subject's texts. He classifies her work as autobiographical, and as a manifestation of her "real" life. Székely's work aligns itself to academic dissertations, complete with a sixty-page long bibliography and an extensive index. In contrast to Székely's biography Fritz's is aimed at a general, non-academic audience, which Fritz implicitly assumes reads in order to be entertained. Approximately half of his biography consists of quotations, loosely linked together by the biographer's comments in order to

give the reader the impression of immediacy and of active participation in the subject's life. The language Fritz uses is highly idiomatic and overall his biography is consistent with his professional training as a journalist.

This thesis deals with each biography independently, examining the ways the writers deal with their female subjects and how, in the process of writing, they reproduce dominant patriarchal ideology. Attempting to create meaningful and cohesive accounts from an amorphous accumulation of facts, biographers, like all other writers, construct narratives. In so doing these life-writers become the representatives and producers of the prevailing discourse of liberal humanism.

In this thesis "biography" is understood to mean "literary biography," that is, a narrative based on the life and works of a writer. In a post-Saussurean age, "facts" can never be deemed essentially true, finite or fixed, although biographers tend to agree that their biographies represent a true and accurate portrait of their subject. Facts are products of discourse, which in turn determines their interpretation. The "subject" (or "biographee") is the person whose life is interpreted through that discourse, but, as will be shown, by appropriating an authorial role and constructing their own subject-positions in their biographies, the biographers inevitably redefine their subjects as objects of their narratives.

The term "author" (used as a verb and a noun) is understood in a literal and figurative sense. Literally it means the person writing the text--either the biographee producing her texts or the biographer producing his biography. In its figurative sense "to author" signifies the act of appropriating a subject-position which in traditional ideological discourse is also a position of power. The subject "writes" his object, taking possession of her through language, and defining her as his subordinate other. The "reader" subsequently reads meaning into the text, constructing her own version of the narrative through her discourse(s). In writing an autobiographical text, the subject reads her past life, producing in her text but one possible

subject-position (or several possible subject positions) of many. In writing a biography, the biographer must read his subject's life and writing. In reproducing his reading in the text through language, he necessarily writes himself into his biography. It is with the biographers' subject-positions produced by their discourse that this thesis is concerned. As the biographers discussed here are male and their subjects female, I shall use the corresponding gender-specific pronouns when discussing biographers and subjects in general.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Subject of Biography

I

Literary biographies are biographies that deal with writing subjects. The analysis of biographies which describe the lives of other types of subject precludes certain questions which are fundamental to a discussion of literary biographies: How does the biographer, as a writer, construct his subject? How does he deal with his subject's fictional writing? How does he present the relationship between the subject's life and the subject's writing? And how does the biographer evaluate his own act of writing in relationship to that of his subject?

As noted, the biographies discussed in this thesis are literary biographies written by men who chose women as their subjects. A cursory glance at their titles will immediately illustrate the differing emphases placed by the biographers in their texts: Cronwright-Schreiner entitles his biography The Life of Olive Schreiner,¹ Johannes Meintjes entitles his Olive Schreiner, Portrait of a South African Woman,² Johannes Székely gives his book the title Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow. Leben und Werk,³ while Helmut Fritz's title reads Die erotische Rebellion. Das Leben der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow.⁴

We see that while Cronwright-Schreiner gives weight to his subject's life alone, Meintjes places her within her social environment, defining her specifically as a South African and as a woman. Székely highlights the interaction between his subject's life and work, while Fritz presents her life as an erotic rebellion. Fritz's title suggests that he is less concerned with his subject's oeuvre than with the correlation of her psycho-sexual development to the expectations of German nineteenth-century societal and ideological norms.

Further, in their titles both Fritz and Székely name their subject "Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow," thus highlighting her aristocratic heritage. This is a deliberate choice, as there are many other possible names by which she could be defined. Székely uses this title in order to lend increased importance to his subject, whereas Fritz, in his biography, alternates between the names "die Gräfin," "Franziska," "die Reventlow," "die tolle Fanny," and "Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow," depending on the aspects of her life he wishes to emphasize within a particular context. An example of the complete avoidance of the use of Franziska zu Reventlow's aristocratic title is presented by Ursula Püschel, a writer from the former German Democratic Republic, in her Marxist essay entitled "Jugendstil-Erotik. Franziska Reventlow" (1981).⁵

The respective sexes of the biographers and their subjects allow for a particularly interesting discussion of male presentations of women's texts and lives. Unlike male critics of women's writing, who deal only with women's literary production, each of these four biographers also attempts to reconstruct his female subject's life. As the biographer's reconstruction is necessarily presented from his own subjective point of view, he not only reproduces his subject's life, but also writes himself into his text. In so doing, the biographer assumes a dominant role in opposition to the subordinate one he assigns to his subject, thus demonstrating his ability to take control of her life and writing as her author. His act of writing the biography comes to signify his appropriation of her. But before discussing the gender issues which arise from the biographical writing process, it will be necessary to look at some general assumptions inherent in traditional literary biographical theory.

II

Biography, by its very definition, is firmly entrenched in traditional Western ideology. In keeping with the expressive-realist texts of early nineteenth-century humanism, it presumes the notion of a fixed reality which pre-exists the subject's writing, and which can, to a greater or lesser degree, be re-presented

objectively by the biographer. According to Catherine Belsey's definition, expressive realism is:

... the theory that literature reflects the *reality* of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who *expresses* it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true.⁶

Even before they start writing, biographers adopt the conventional role of omniscient and distinct author. By defining themselves as biographers, they display confidence in their own ability to know the life of their subject as the subject herself could never have known it, for, in empiricist-idealist terms, only in retrospect and viewed from the outside can a life be perceived as a complete, finite and therefore potentially knowable unity. Viewing her life at the time of writing, the subject can never fully ascertain its outcome, can never judge it in its entirety, because every life only becomes complete with the subject's death. Further, even when biographers deal with the lives of living subjects they assume an omniscient role, supporting the notion that the life can only be objectively presented by someone viewing it from the outside. It is this basic belief in the ability to objectively portray a life which places most literary biographers firmly within the empiricist-idealist tradition.

In most cases the biographer has not known his subject personally. His only means of approaching his subject is through her texts. These are deemed largely autobiographical, in that they directly or indirectly express the subject's experiences:

I do not mean to suggest that a literary biographer is not expected to deliver a literary judgment... But even if the works are treated mainly as biographical events ... they must be read and analyzed, for in some important ways they are the clue to and even the chart of the mind and being of his subject. This is particularly the situation if the work is imaginative, and even if it is not generally autobiographical in the usual sense ... it is nevertheless an autobiography of the spirit.⁷

While all texts written by and about the subject are deemed to be valid expressions of the "real" subject, those seen as "generally autobiographical in the usual sense," that is, texts entitled "autobiography," letters, and diaries, are considered more valid and obvious bearers of the subject's "true" character:

The most immediate life is, of course, autobiography or diaries, letters and autobiographical memoirs. These are the primary stuff of history.⁸

If the biographer has the added advantage of having personally known his subject, his remembered conversations with her are valued as highly as her letters. Letters, according to Park Honan, are written conversations:

The 'expressivist anthropology' holds that a person realizes his or her identity chiefly through the spoken and written word; we accordingly take the subject's talk or letters as prime biographical documents.⁹

These views present the notion of a subject who is determined by and therefore knowable through the sum total of her (primary) writings and secondary documents--that is, legal documents concerning her and reports by eyewitnesses about her. Honan describes the biographer's act of revelation as the discovery of a "parameter," which he defines as "a variable factor entering into distributions, and one may take it in biography to mean a reaction to life--a reaction that may enter into a few, many, or all of one's subject's experiences" (Honan 645). While a parameter is not a "static 'trait,'" it is nevertheless "fixed in value by evidence of the moment" (Honan 645). The successful biographer must isolate these common denominators by comparing his subject's texts. An accumulation of parameters will reveal the subject's indisputable, empirical, true life, giving the biographer access to a "correct view of a person" (Honan 646).

The biographer's faith in his ability to reveal the subject's true life permeates traditional biographical criticism. Paul Mariani writes of "that moment of light when the inner life of

their [the biographers'] subject was suddenly revealed,"¹⁰ and Frank E. Vandiver claims that the aim of biography (and art) is to illuminate reality.¹¹ Many biographers acknowledge the subjective aspects of biographical writing. Mark Schorer defines biography as the "interpenetration of one mind by another, and is this not, for all the apparent objectivity one may achieve, a considerably subjective operation?" (Schorer 91), and Ira B. Nadel views biography as a "verifiable fiction."¹² Yet in general biographers display the faith that their view is as close to the truth as possible. In Wallace Martin's terms they are committed realists who hold "that [their] point of view is *true*, and that others are, if not false, at least seriously distorted."¹³ A most striking example is Stephen B. Oates's claim that he "had a visitation" from his subject, implying that he literally brought him to life after having become "utterly and completely immersed in his life and times."¹⁴

These views are evident in the biographies discussed here: Cronwright-Schreiner claims to have been the "only person who ever had an opportunity of knowing [Olive Schreiner] thoroughly" (Life viii), while Meintjes claims to have an "intimate knowledge" of his subject's background through their similar experiences of life in South Africa (preface). Székely lays claim to knowledge of his subject through his definitive analysis of her literary texts. Her texts, which he claims are autobiographical ("fast alle Werke der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow ... [haben] autobiographischen Charakter ... oder [enthalten] autobiographische Elemente" [Leben und Werk xv]), are represented by the metaphor of the mirror, which at once describes the life as mirrored in her work and her work as a direct representation of her life. This biographer, therefore, need only analyze her texts in order to reveal her true life. Fritz, instead of discussing his authorial role in a preface, opens his biography with an eyewitness account by her friend, Erich Mühsam (Die erotische Rebellion 6), thus creating the illusion of distancing himself and allowing his subject and her contemporaries to speak for themselves. In fact, this method displays Fritz's faith in his ability to gain and subsequently impart knowledge through his own reading and selection of eyewitness reports.

Each biographer approaches his subject's life and work from a distinct and subjective point of view, yet the biographies discussed here all display characteristics of nineteenth-century realism. Although the manifestations of these characteristics are unique to each biography, the assumptions with regard to the location of truth and to the method of gaining knowledge of that truth form the foundation of these four biographies.

III

Traditional biographers believe in their ability to re-create the truth--or at the very least an approximation of the truth--through the medium of language. In keeping with conventional literary theory they perceive language as "a more or less transparent 'medium' for communication" and the writer as using but "in no sense 'used' by it."¹⁵ Having achieved a full understanding of his subject, the biographer reconstructs her life in a subjective narrative form, whereby "the more intimate the evidence--letters, diary, reminiscences--the nearer the reader can be brought to the subject."¹⁶

Language is perceived as a tool over which the biographer has complete control. Thus he is able to manipulate discourse in order present the "real" subject: "If a biography is to portray an individual closely, its prose ought to suit the individual" (Honan 646). Language is deemed fixed and referential. "He [the biographer] is like the sculptor who doesn't invent his clay, or the painter who doesn't invent the tubes out of which he squeezes his paint," claims Oates, adding that "Biography is the art of human portrayal in words" (Oates 20). In this manner the biographer becomes the authoring subject and a god-like creator:

... the biographer as creator, the dustman reassembling the dust, like the God of Genesis breathing life into a few handfuls of ashes. For the biographer is as much the inventor, the maker, as the poet or the novelist when it comes to creating a life out of the *prima materia* we call words. (Mariani 104)

While this biographer acknowledges his own subjectivity, he also emphasizes the existence of an external, a priori truth. Traditional biographers present themselves as having better access to this truth than their readers. On the one hand their empirical knowledge is derived from a greater body of texts, which can never be included in the biography in its entirety: "I find my main practical problem in biography to be selection--or exclusion--in connection with organization ... my task is to cull from this mass certain selections of evidence ... so as to reveal my subject as closely as history ... permits" (Honan 640-1). On the other hand they present themselves as having a faculty more suitable than that of the general reader for obtaining the truth from those facts, and as better equipped to subsequently communicate that truth: "The biographer, out of the mating of an extrinsic experience ... and his imagination, recreates a world, to which he attempts to give something of the reality of illusion" (Kendall 35).

The belief in the transparency of language is not overtly stated in the biographies presented here. Rather, discussions of linguistic methods and of language are conspicuous by their absence, implying that for each of these biographers language itself is unproblematic. They presume from the outset that they are able to perceive the true facts conveyed by their subjects' texts and to subsequently communicate them without distortion.

IV

While the essential truth is seen as residing in the interpretation of an accumulation of facts, biographers differ in their attitudes towards the construction of their narratives. Some see the most successful biography as the largest possible accumulation of facts with the least possible subjective commentary by the biographer. Based on empiricism, this view leads to the conclusion that the biographer must at all costs remain hidden from the reader's view: "the biographer ... must keep his own voice out of the story so that the subject and his times can live again," states Oates (125), while Kendall claims:

"The highest biographical art is the concealment of the biographer" (38). This notion is evident in Cronwright-Schreiner's Life, which extends to over four hundred pages of quotations from his subject's novels, from documents, from letters to and from his subject, and from eyewitness reports. It is also applied by Fritz, who randomly links quotations from texts by his subject and her contemporaries, adding only enough of his own writing to produce a coherent narrative.

For other life-writers the essential truth lies in the biographer's mind, reason or thought. By omitting the inessential and subjectively interpreting the essential, the biographer is believed to achieve the most accurate picture of his subject in a text which is concise, unified, and which follows the conventions of fiction:

... a sense of the author's presence in the biographical narrative is needed if we are to convey feelings accurately ... I must present a 'story,' a coherent and clear narrative line, and on this linear string I can attach facts that are known about my author for given times in his life. (Honan 649-50)

This is the method applied by Meintjes, who, rather than quoting directly from biographical sources, paraphrases them without acknowledgements, and integrates them into his text. While privileging the (in traditional terms) fictional rather than the factual aspects of biography, Meintjes insists on applying a cause/effect model typical of realist narratives. In so doing, however, he has been criticised for inventing facts.¹⁷

Both views--the empiricist emphasis on objective facts and the idealist emphasis on subjective narration--presume the existence of an a priori external reality. Biography thus perceived is critiqued according to its truth-value. Consequently, conservative biographers writing about their profession tend to emphasize the process of gaining knowledge of the truth rather than the process of writing the narrative, thus implying that the

transmission of the truth to the reader is relatively straightforward. While the reader is not always presented as a passive receptacle--some biographers claim that the reader actively participates in the reconstruction of the subject--the belief in the ability to capture the a priori truth through writing persists in much biographical criticism.

V

As we have seen, much theoretical writing regarding biography is firmly based on traditional ideology. The four biographies presented here are examples of the views put forward by humanism and its corresponding narrative form, classic realism. Yet in recent years psychoanalysis, structuralism, and post-structuralism have caused a reassessment of the traditional humanist beliefs in the fixed subject, the existence of an essential, a priori truth, and the referentiality of language.

In light of Freudian psychoanalysis, the unified individual of Cartesian and Kantian philosophy becomes a complex and constantly changing subject, whose concept of self-identity and self-consciousness is constructed in terms of a signifying system analogous to language. According to Richard Rorty, Freud sees "every ... life as an attempt to clothe itself in its own metaphors."¹⁸ This view has far-reaching consequences for a biographical theory which validates its very existence through confidence in its ability to present "universal truths held in common by people of all generations and all societies" (Oates 125). This is recognized by Ira B. Nadel, by far the most progressive biographical theorist, who claims that "The desire of biography to deliver an enclosed self is actually a myth about biography that must be dispelled... The illusion of unity is always experienced by the reader and biographer but not the subject."¹⁹

Freud destroyed the humanist notion of the individual as the centre of the universe by defining consciousness as a process of textualization. By constructing narratives from our experiences, we are able to "catch hold of some crucial

idiosyncratic contingencies in our past" in order to "make something worthwhile out of ourselves" thus creating present selves which we can respect (Rorty 33). The method of attempting to glean the essential subject from an accumulation of biographical facts and writing becomes fruitless. In post-Freudian terms, each text constitutes merely one possible subject-position --or indeed several possible subject-positions--of many. The attempt at self-description is constantly *aufgehoben* ²⁰--to use Hegel's term--by subsequent attempts. Each subject-position can never be completed but only supervened by death. The accumulation and interpretation of biographical data thus constitutes not the search for the common denominator which is the essence of human experience, but the recognition that meaning is constantly deferred.

Post-structuralism and structuralism attempt to reverse the empiricist-idealist limitations placed on the process of narration by showing how the narrative constitutes the subject's act of self-construction through discourse, which is never authentic, original, or referential but always ideological. Thus, on the one hand meaning arises from the process of the construction of the narrative, for there can be no external reality to which the text can refer. "There is no outside-the-text,"²¹ writes Jacques Derrida in his discussion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions. "What Rousseau has said ... cannot be separated from the system of his own writing" (Acts 104). The subject-position(s) presented in the text constitute(s) the subject's self, but at the moment of production it is always already in the past, even as it is recorded. The subject is therefore never fixed or unified, but always in the process of becoming.

On the other hand, language is matter, existing prior to its appropriation by the writer, and independently from him. As such, it is ideological, and idiosyncratic to a particular society at a particular time:

Ideology is *inscribed in* discourse in the sense that it is literally written or spoken *in it* ; it is not a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of 'ideas' and is subsequently embodied in words, but a way of thinking, speaking, experiencing. (Belsey 5)

If discourse is seen to be ideological before it is used by the writer, and the writer is seen as a series of subject-positions construed through it, the writer can no longer be deemed capable of controlling language. Or, put in Derrida's own terms,

... the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. (Acts 101)

Analogous to Freud's act of decentering the individual, modern literary theory subverts the privileged position traditionally held by the individual author. The view that language is crucial to our self-perception, both using and used by us, results in the notion that true meaning exists only in the single text, which can only ever be one example of a myriad of possibilities of self-construction. In modern literary theory language itself becomes the focus of attention.

VI

The most important corollary of modern literary and philosophical thought is the view that the subject's texts no longer refer to an extrinsic reality. Therefore biography can no longer be judged according to its ability to accurately portray that reality. The written text (the biography) becomes not only the site of construction of the biographical subject (from the biographer's point of view), but also the site of production of the

biographer's own identity. Thus the biographical subject becomes merely the content of the biography, the biographer's object in opposition to which he creates his own subject-position. The original topic, the biographical subject's life, becomes the plot or the vehicle for the construction of the authoring biographer's self. It is therefore to the construction of the subject-position of the biographer, not to the presentation of the biographical subject, that biography critics must turn their attention.

By presenting particular subject-positions through their biographies, biographers write narratives. They often liken their profession to that of the historian. Many claim that both biographers and historians process factual data and subsequently reproduce that data in the form of a narrative. This leads to the claim that the biographer is a "specialized kind of historian,"²² and to the definition of biography as "the handmaiden of history" (Vandiver 57). In his introduction to Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Hayden White defines the act of creating fiction out of fact as "emplotment." Given the "unprocessed historical record" the historian must render it more comprehensible to his particular audience by providing his chronicle with a plot structure.²³ In order to do this he must arrange the factual events into a temporal structure, into a beginning, middle, and end, thus uniting an accumulation of discrete facts into a new entity, his story. Traditionally the historian, unlike the writer of fiction, is not believed to invent his narrative. He is seen as "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the facts, a conception, according to White, that "obscures the extent to which 'invention' also plays a part in the historian's operation" (White 6-7). In keeping with this view regarding the fictional aspects of historical writing, Nadel asks,

Can the collection and ordering of data in a person's life ever give us complete knowledge of the truth, or must one recognize the fundamental inability of ever knowing the past exactly and therefore accept its fictions?
(Fiction, Fact and Form 209)

According to White's (and Nadel's) definition, there can be no accurate, objective record of the historical facts. The linguistic representation of facts invariably involves the narrative acts of emplotment and invention. History--and by implication biography--becomes no more and no less than a product of fiction, indeed, the very term "biography" becomes suspect. Thus Nadel states:

Every biography is in one sense a failure because it cannot duplicate the life of its subject nor recreate its character on the page. (Fiction, Fact and Form 102)

Biography can only remain intact as a discrete genre in post-Saussurean, post-Freudian society because the reader and biographer alike align themselves to and are produced by traditional ideology. "The biographer recognises, in all honesty, that he is rather cautious, even on occasion timid: he is by nature conservative," claims Brian Matthews.²⁴ If biographers want their product to be a successful commodity, if they apply the very term "biography" to their work, they need to conform to the reader's expectations. Nadel claims,

Emplotment provides fact with fictive meaning while gratifying our desire to resolve our own sense of fragmentation through the unity or story of the lives of others--and implicitly our own. The fictive power of 'story' provides us with a coherent vision of life. (Fiction, Fact and Form 9).

Nadel further describes the current popularity of biography as a reaction against the insecurity the reader experiences when confronted with modern "experimentalist" novels, which "present a world divorced from the empirical experiences of the reader" ("Narrative and the Popularity of Biography" 131).

In order to present a cohesive narrative, biographers are obliged to apply the narrative methods of fiction. While objectivist biographers emphasize the need to keep themselves

out of their texts, Nadel claims that the notion of the "invisible" biographer is itself,

... a fiction, since the form of presentation is always an interpretation, but the illusion of no imposed pattern of meaning may equate with the reader's own feelings that his personal life is similarly without form. At the same time, to read about a life, to re-examine it as a text, reassures the reader's need to see the coherence of life and comprehensibility of experience. ("Narrative and the Popularity of Biography" 136)

Readers expect that a literary biographical text will enhance their knowledge, that it will provide them with new information, will help them to understand the "transcendent human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual" (Belsey 7), will help them comprehend and appreciate the subject's fictional writing and will generally be a pleasurable experience. Thus, while the reader chooses a work of fiction according to its author,

... we do not very often come to biography by thinking to ourselves: I want to read some Ludwig or some Maurois or some Marquis James. Rather, we desire to read a life of Napoleon or a life of Byron or a life of Andrew Jackson.... The biographer does not regret this state of affairs; it is, indeed, the crown of his labors. (Kendall 38)

Kendall, like many other biographers, constructs a position of humility and subordinates himself to his subject. He even presents this position as the result of his own choice ("The biographer does not regret this ... it is the crown of his labors"). However he appears to rest uneasy with his own depiction of himself as invisible author. The paradox is inherent to the traditional view of biography: while Kendall defines himself as the invisible mediator of the truth, he also asserts his role as author ("biographers [are] writers of a kind" [Kendall 34]), and finally emphasizes his position as controlling and authoring subject in the very act of the writing this assertive essay.

The reader of a biography expects to find within the text a comprehensible story which will help her to trace a coherent pattern of life. In order to satisfy the reader's desire, the biographer, like the historian, must create a narrative from unprocessed historical records. While biographers are forced to adhere to the traditionally realist demands of their audience--that their narratives are indeed accurate representations of the facts--modern philosophical and psychoanalytical thought has subverted the very assumptions on which they base their notions of biography. Therefore, while biographers have had their authorial role challenged by modern literary theory, they must nevertheless comply with their readers' definition of them as "knowing" authors.

VII

Some biographers do indeed acknowledge their own roles as writers of fiction, although not always explicitly. According to Paul Mariani, the biographer must "shape and select and reorder" the words which make up the subject's life (Mariani 104). Honan sees the main practical problem in biography as the process of "selection--or exclusion--in connection with organization" (Honan 640), and Vandiver defines the biographer's sternest task as the selection, arrangement and organization of "the mass of data" from which he must "conjure life from leavings" (Vandiver 61).

While defining themselves as authoring subjects biographers must not claim the greatness for themselves that they attribute to their subjects. To do so would be to define the status of the subject as less than exceptional and unique, and it is largely through the exceptionality of their subjects that biographers validate their texts, gain their own status, and justify their very existence as biographers. The greater the subject, the more elevated the status of the biographer becomes as discoverer/author of that subject. However, through his need to subordinate himself to his great subject, the literary biographer is

always overshadowed by his subject-as-author, and his own position as author is therefore always compromised.

At the same time the biographer must never be seen to perceive himself as overshadowed by his subject. To make a direct claim to inferiority would be to undermine the value of the biography as a commodity in the eyes of the reader. Biographers, like all publishing writers, desire to be read. In an attempt to satisfy the readers' traditional views of biography, and thus fulfil the demands of biography as a commodity, the biographer must maintain the illusion of control over his subject, defining her in his own terms and constructing a version of her which suits his ultimate goal of presenting his own subject-position. Traditional views of authorship, still essential to the concept and very existence of biography today, are summed up by Roland Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author": "The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child."²⁵ Barthes continues,

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained'--victory to the critic. ("The Death of the Author" 147)

These, then, are the necessary limits of a genre which defines itself as a product of consumption to be made available to the reading public. Biographers, in accepting these limits along with the reader, appropriate an ambiguous position as authors of their texts, at once needing to subordinate themselves to the subject--who is also an author--while at the same time they inevitably present themselves as authoring subjects. In Derridean terms the biographical subject "cannot be separated from the system of

[its] own writing" (Acts 104). "Our reading," declares Derrida, "must be intrinsic and remain within the text" (Acts 102).

VIII

In literary biographies by men about women the complex issue of authorship becomes an issue of patriarchal ideology. Within patriarchal ideology women are constructed as inferior subjects, and the question therefore arises, why men would choose to write biographies about women in the first place. We can answer this question if we assume that, while women are seen in patriarchy as generally disempowered, individual women have been able to appropriate traditional male roles, thus becoming empowered in patriarchal terms. Such women are deemed particularly valuable by biographers, whose main concern consists in reproducing the lives of powerful and influential subjects, male or female.

Biographies of exceptional women writers serve several purposes in patriarchal society. They are presented as examples to the mass of disempowered women, both presenting patriarchal structures as benevolent and able to be transcended through the non-threatening act of writing, and at the same time defining exceptional women as worthy of emulation by their female contemporaries. The presentation of lives which are seen to be conducted outside conventional society also serves to reinforce dominant ideals, defining patriarchal society as the safe and benevolent norm to which the average "normal" female should aspire.

Since the late nineteenth-century more interest has been shown in women's writing. Women's texts and texts about women have become a valuable commodity in the publishing business. In view of the power women have gained in the last one hundred years (although still not comparable to male power), it has become politically correct for men to acknowledge writing by women--as long as that writing does not represent an unduly radical challenge to patriarchal ideology. Further, as women are

traditionally defined as objects of male authorization, female subjects are easier to "author" within the parameters of a biography, as by their biological determination they present no immediate challenge to the biographer's potency as authoring male. As the biographical subject can only be deemed powerful in the realm of writing, the biographer can construct his own dominant role by emphasizing her disempowerment in other areas.

In the biographies discussed here the reasons for choosing a female subject differ from biographer to biographer. Cronwright-Schreiner wrote his wife's biography very soon after her death. During her life she was recognized as a great woman, posing a challenge to her husband's position of power over his wife in a society still strongly determined by patriarchal standards. Cronwright-Schreiner defines himself as her obvious biographer on the basis of his intimate knowledge of her. He was able not only to supply her texts as source material, texts which he had read while she was alive and in some cases had assisted in editing and publishing, but was also able to draw on his own memories of and discussions with her. In Cronwright-Schreiner's biography the spoken word becomes a source of knowledge superior to the written word. Also, his discussions with his subject cannot and need not be justified or validated.

Cronwright-Schreiner became a biographer by circumstance rather than by design. Had he chosen to become a biographer by profession he might well have chosen a male subject. However, the biography suggests that his marriage to Olive Schreiner was in the first place a manifestation of his desire to author his subject while she was still alive. In this sense, the biography becomes an extension of a process of authoring, and represents the conclusion of the development of the male author.

Cronwright-Schreiner's biography appears as an assertion of his male self, which he constructs as having been subverted and compromised by his wife. Olive Schreiner was defined by her contemporaries as active, masculine, independent,

unconventional and subversive. On their marriage Cronwright-Schreiner took his wife's name, thus leaving himself open--within a strongly conservative and Calvinist society--to the charge of being an emasculated male. After his wife's death he wasted no time before he began to gather information and documents about her, with the intention of writing her first biography. In so doing he re-established his control over his wife, constructing himself as the virile, authoring male. In his biography Cronwright-Schreiner constructs (and fictionalizes) a version of his past role as authoring male over his wife (through the content), while at the same time he writes himself as present author of the text (through its formal presentation as a biography). His biography constitutes the construction of a subject-position in which he presents himself with a worthwhile subject-position.

Meintjes appears to identify with his subject's South African upbringing, which he defines as having been similar to his own. He presents her as a great woman of her time, but as no longer South Africa's greatest writer. By constructing himself as a writer able to author, that is, control such a great woman, he places himself in a position of potency as a male and as a writer. His credentials on the back cover of his biography emphasize his accomplishments as an author. Further, according to the dust wrapper of the 1965 edition of his biography, he claimed to have worked on his biography for nineteen years. While he can be seen to have completed his work, Olive Schreiner, according to Meintjes, worked on some of her texts for over forty years, yet they remained incomplete at the time of her death. The choice of a woman subject, in Meintjes's case, allows him to present himself as an author superior to his subject-as-author. Consequently, he all but omits discussion of his subject's political activities, an area which lies outside his realm of experience and writing.

However, Meintjes is forced to acknowledge Cronwright-Schreiner's original biography. In so doing, he appears to be suffering from the "anxiety of influence" defined by Harold Bloom, who claims: "If this book's argument is correct, then the

covert subject of most poetry for the last three centuries has been the anxiety of influence, each poet's fear that no proper work remains for him to perform."²⁶ Meintjes's biography can be read as his teleological progression through Bloom's six revisionary ratios,²⁷ which will ultimately allow him to achieve the status of "strong poet." Part of this process involves the act of imposing limits on Cronwright-Schreiner's potent and virile position. In this sense, the content of Meintjes's biography appears as a *Bildungsroman*²⁸ in reverse, as Cronwright-Schreiner becomes increasingly emasculated and powerless, a victim of his monster-wife.

Yet at the same time Cronwright-Schreiner's text imprisons Meintjes in the double bind imposed by Bloom's Protestant God (here Cronwright-Schreiner) on the later poet/biographer, in the "double bind of two great injunctions: 'Be like Me' and 'Do not presume to be too like Me'" (Bloom 152). Consequently Meintjes takes Cronwright-Schreiner's biography as the basis of his own text, while at the same time he attempts to construct his text as distinct and novel. This causes him to define his text as more accurate because more modern and Cronwright-Schreiner's as incomplete. Meintjes's attempt to define himself as a strong poet fails, however, in that by repeatedly constructing himself in opposition to Cronwright-Schreiner, he draws attention to his own continuing insecurity with regard to the earlier biographer's authority.

Székely discovered a subject who had not been previously discussed in a full-length biography. This enabled him to assume the role of originating author of his subject. Székely's biography appeared at a time of renewed interest in women's writing, in particular of those texts which in the earlier part of this century were at risk of being lost due to a lack of interest and dwindling availability. Yet Székely appears to rest uneasy with his choice of a female subject, using her as a vehicle for the presentation of those great and significant ("bedeutende") men she knew during her time in Munich. She becomes the "parameter" within the lives

of these men, and a point of departure for Székely's discussion of the Munich Bohemia at the turn of the century.

Székely gains authority over his subject by collapsing the boundaries between the assumed "real" subject and the characters in her "autobiographical" texts. By presenting Franziska zu Reventlow as a product of fiction, Székely is able to analyze her/her texts within the discourse of literary criticism. Further, he asserts his own authorial position by aligning himself with other (male) literary critics whose recognition he seeks through his biography. Franziska zu Reventlow becomes increasingly marginalized within the text, while preference is given to a discussion of her male contemporaries--those she knew and those whose literary texts she read. Székely's biography becomes a dialogue between males with a (fictive) female object as its topic.

Székely appropriates Franziska zu Reventlow's texts by reading them in patriarchal terms. Yet his subject appears to reject marginalization, and her texts undermine Székely's construction of her as a mere character within them. The ambiguous subject-positions she constructs in her fictional texts become problematic, for on the one hand they are open to interpretation, while on the other hand they refuse to be fixed within patriarchal and traditional literary discourse. In a final attempt to categorize his subject and to construct himself as her author, Székely sweepingly defines her texts as ironic, and overstates this definition, thus displaying his insecurity as the author/biographer of a subversive female subject.

Fritz appears to have chosen his subject according to her value as a commodity for the consumption by the general public. His biography appeared shortly after Székely's, at a time when sexuality, in particular female sexuality, had become an acceptable topic of conversation outside an academic context. He constructs his subject as a female writing about female sexuality, and in so doing he presents her as an object particularly for male--that is his own--consumption. In Fritz's biography,

Franziska zu Reventlow becomes the source of titillation and an object of the male voyeuristic gaze. She also becomes defined as a commodity to be passed at will from man to man.

According to Fritz, female emancipation and the "female" in general are purely a question of sexuality, which in Fritz's terms signifies the sex-act. In constructing his subject as sexually liberated, he shows her as fulfilling the acceptable role of a privately (as opposed to militantly) emancipated woman. Her status becomes elevated when she is seen to fulfil these male expectations, but she is presented as "diseased," excessive and deviant when he alludes to her rejection of them. Fritz's short and superficial allusions to feminist theory and history seem to be intended to assert his acquiescence in his subject's opinions and lifestyle, yet the superficiality of these references engenders a tone of condescension. At once supporting and rejecting his subject's views, Fritz appears both fascinated by and anxious about female sexuality.

IX

As has been shown, while on the surface these biographers present their subjects as great women, they must also assert their own authority within the texts in order to construct their own subject-positions. In spite of the fact that they view themselves as dealing with subordinate members of society, they display insecurities with regard to their own authorship of these exceptional women. As the biographers construct their subjects' lives and oeuvres in patriarchal terms, they avoid all discussion of the implications of these women's subversive opinions on their subjects' lives. Fritz alone refers to his subject's rejection of patriarchal standards. He does this by summing it up--and subsequently dispensing with it--in the term "Rebellion" in his title.

Having been raised and educated within a patriarchal society, it is inevitable that these biographers construct their subjects through the corresponding ideological discourse. This

discourse, which privileges the male qualities of dominance, virility, and superiority, inevitably causes them to define their female subjects in terms of the opposite female qualities of subordination, emasculation, and inferiority. The subject-positions the biographers construct for themselves in the process of writing are therefore both products and producers of patriarchal discourse.

Notes

- 1 Samuel Cron Cronwright-Schreiner, The Life of Olive Schreiner (London: Unwin, 1924). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
- 2 Johannes Meintjes, Olive Schreiner, Portrait of a South African Woman (Johannesburg: Keartland, 1965). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
- 3 Johannes Székely, Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, Leben und Werk (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
- 4 Helmut Fritz, Die erotische Rebellion, Das Leben der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1980). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
- 5 Ursula Püschel, "Jugendstil-Erotik," Mit allen Sinnen, Frauen in der Literatur, Essays (Halle-Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1980).
- 6 Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London and New York: Methuen, 1980) 7.
- 7 Mark Schorer, "The Burdens of Biography," Biography as High Adventure, Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 86.

- 8 Barbara W. Tuchman, "Biography as a Prism of History," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 100.
- 9 Park Honan, "Beyond Sartre, Vercors, and Bernard Crick: Theory and Form in Literary Biographies," New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation 16.3 (1985): 645.
- 10 Paul Mariani, "Reassembling the Dust," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 110.
- 11 Frank E. Vandiver, "Biography as an Agent of Humanism," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 51.
- 12 Ira B. Nadel, "Narrative and the Popularity of Biography," Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature 20.4 (1987): 135.
- 13 Wallace Martin, Recent Theories of Narrative (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1986) 61.
- 14 Stephen B. Oates, "Biography as High Adventure," in Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 130.
- 15 Anthony Easthope, Poetry as Discourse (London and New York: Methuen, 1988) 10-11.
- 16 Paul Murray Kendall, "Walking the Boundaries," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 36.
- 17 See Ruth First and Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner (London: Deutsch, 1980). First and Scott claim: "Meintjes' biography is emphatic that Olive 'allowed [Julius Gau] to seduce her. She missed a period, and she became terrified that she was pregnant. Julius Gau promised that if it was really so, he would stand

by her and marry her. They thus became engaged, but he did not really want to marry her, and neither did Olive want to marry him for she soon found him to be quite different from the man she had imagined.' This is pure supposition, based only upon Olive's uncertainty about the announcement of the engagement, her mention of 'next week', and the wry comment about 'circumstances altering cases'" (63).

18 Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of Selfhood," Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge UP)36.

19 Ira B. Nadel, Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984) 180-1.

20 According to Peggy Kamuf, Hegel's term *Aufhebung* "literally means 'lifting up'; but it also contains the double meaning of conservation and negation. For Hegel, dialectics is a process of *Aufhebung* : every concept is to be negated and lifted up to a higher sphere in which it is thereby conserved. In this way, there is nothing from which the *Aufhebung* cannot profit" (A Derrida Reader, Between the Blinds, ed. Peggy Kamuf [New York: Columbia UP, 1991] 78n12).

21 Jacques Derrida, Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge 1992) 102.

22 Leon Edel, "The Figure under the Carpet," Biography as High Adventure, Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 20.

23 Hayden White, Metahistory, The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 5.

24 Brian Matthews, "Writers' Week Panel. Biography," Southern Review 22.1 (1989): 29.

25 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," Image-Music-Text, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 145.

26 Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 148.

27 Harold Bloom identifies six revisionary ratios, which an aspiring poet must complete in order to relieve his anxiety of influence so as to become a "strong" poet like his precursor. The six revisionary ratios are: *clinamen*, which refers to poetic misreading or misprision. In this process the "ephebe" poet seeks to swerve away from his precursor towards a corrective movement in his own poem. *Tessera* is the process of attempting to antithetically complete the earlier poet's work so as to retain its terms but mean them in another sense. *Kenosis* is a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor. In *daemonization*, the "ephebe" poet stations his poem in relation to the precursor's poem in order to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work. In *askesis* the young poet yields up some of his own human and imaginative endowment to separate himself from others. *Apophrades* represents the return of the dead. The later poet, in his final phase, attains the position of a "strong" poet, by holding his own poem open to the precursor's work so that it appears as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work (Bloom 14-16).

28 The *Bildungsroman* is an "exceptionally influential type of German novel ... in which the centre of interest is to be found not so much in the adventures of the hero, himself a passive character, as in the effects which his experiences are seen to have in his growth to maturity and clarity of purpose, after perhaps fumbling beginnings. Such a novel is often a veiled autobiography of the author ... with its aim of full self-development, inspired by the art and wisdom of the past and present" (E.W. Herd and August Obermeyer [eds.], A Glossary of German Literary Terms [Dunedin: University of Otago, 1992]).

CHAPTER TWO

Samuel Cron Cronwright-Schreiner: The Subject as Other

I

In the preface to his biography, The Life of Olive Schreiner, Samuel Cron Cronwright-Schreiner remarks that "if Olive Schreiner could have chosen, she would have preferred that no biography of herself should be written" (vii). She had stated, "There can be no *absolutely true* life of anyone except written by themselves and then only if written for the eye of God" (vii). Cronwright-Schreiner argues that, as his subject had begun work on her "Reminiscences," an account of her childhood, she cannot have been averse to "some record" of her life being left. Further, she had told him several years before her death that, if a biography should be written, she would like her husband to write it, and, failing that, her "old friend, Havelock Ellis." Olive Schreiner had met Ellis, a writer, physician, and sexologist, in 1884, and had remained in contact with him until her death.

Cronwright-Schreiner was married to his subject for twenty-six years, from 1894 until her death in 1920. His biography was completed within three years of her death,¹ a fact for which he has been severely criticized, in particular by Olive Schreiner's later biographer, Johannes Meintjes.² Cronwright-Schreiner justifies his reasons for writing his wife's biography so soon after her death by stating that if he had not, some unauthorized life "necessarily incomplete and almost certainly incorrect" would appear (vii).

Cronwright-Schreiner presents himself as reluctant to become his wife's biographer, claiming that he had initially asked Ellis to write her first biography:

On her death, not wishing to write my wife's biography myself, I wrote to Ellis telling him what she had said and asking him if he would care to undertake it, promising to aid him in every way possible. (vii)

After Ellis refused, Cronwright-Schreiner felt compelled to proceed with the task himself, but a sense of fear of being judged adversely for writing it prevails throughout the biography.

Cronwright-Schreiner had every reason to resent his wife whose reputation overshadowed his own achievements. There is no doubt that he made many sacrifices on account of her unconventional life-style. A short while after their marriage he gave up his livelihood as a farmer because the climate at the farm which he managed exacerbated her asthma. He entered into a period of financial insecurity and was frequently forced to move, again because places which had initially seemed suitable to his wife's health invariably became life-threatening after a period of time. For the same reason she travelled a lot, leaving her husband at their various places of residence.

Living in the public eye within a conservative, Calvinistic society at the turn of the century, Cronwright-Schreiner must have been the target of much talk. Yet throughout his biography he never attempts to undermine the status his wife had achieved in the literary and political arenas, nor does he present her as anything other than a woman of great genius. He frequently emphasizes her greatness by referring to texts written by people who had known her personally, all of which are marked by their high praise of her.

However, the sub-text suggests that Cronwright-Schreiner's biography constitutes his attempt at re-establishing his role as autonomous individual in opposition to the possibility that his peers viewed him as dominated and disempowered. In order to re-empower himself Cronwright-Schreiner appropriates the role of "knowing" author, thus allowing himself to present his subject accurately, while at the same time defining himself as independent of her. This narratorial stance, according to Barthes, views the narrator as

... a sort of omniscient, apparently impersonal, consciousness that tells the story from a superior point of view, that of God: the narrator is at once inside his characters (since he knows everything that goes on in them) and outside them (since he never identifies with any one more than another).³

The role of omniscient author becomes a symbolic position of power which Cronwright-Schreiner emphasizes by defining his role of "authorized" biographer in opposition to potential "unauthorized" biographers, whose work he claims would be inferior to his own.

Cronwright-Schreiner acknowledges his own subjectivity by concluding his preface with the statement: "I wish to say that everything written in this book (except where the contrary is stated), every opinion expressed, every deduction drawn, everything related, is done by myself, in my own language, and on my sole undivided responsibility" (ix-x). Yet he also emphasizes his ability to give an accurate picture of his wife, claiming, "I am the only person who can be said to have known her, the only person who ever had adequate opportunity of knowing her fully (not excluding even her own family)" (ix). These views highlight the contradictory nature of humanism, which consists of an empiricist-idealist interpretation of the world.

The empiricist view holds that there is an a priori truth to be empirically perceived. Yet idealism requires the recognition of the limitations of the reproduction of that truth, which is believed to be mediated through the subjective artist/writer. Thus while the individual realist writer believes in the existence of an essential, transcendent truth, his own creation (the text, the painting, the biography), can only ever be deemed to approximate that truth. The interplay between the humanist notions of subjectivity and objectivity demand that while the author recognizes his subjectivity--indeed privileges it as the source of meaning--he must also attempt to reproduce his experiences in the most objective manner possible. Therefore, in

keeping with Wallace Martin's definition of the realist author,⁴ Cronwright-Schreiner acknowledges his own subjectivity, and at the same time displays a belief in his ability to present the most accurate possible reconstruction of the truth. He bases this assumption on the notion that his relationship to his subject was the most intimate possible--she was his wife.

As "the only person who ever had an opportunity of knowing [Olive Schreiner] thoroughly" (viii), a claim which appears twice in the three page preface, Cronwright-Schreiner accentuates his privileged authorial position. Expressions such as "She told me ..." (67), "Olive repeatedly referred to ..." (69), and "Olive used to joke about ..." (28) continually reinforce the notion that he deems his biography as accurate because his experience of his subject had been immediate. While he admits a gap in his knowledge with regard to her early life, he validates the authenticity of his account of that period by referring to Ellis's assistance in the biography's production. Ellis, who had promised to "place all his information at [Cronwright-Schreiner's] disposal" (vii), becomes, after the biographer himself, the next most reliable source of the truth.

Cronwright-Schreiner attributes to Ellis an authority which approximates his own. He claims Ellis's records of Olive Schreiner are "of great interest, having to do with a period of her adult life of which I knew comparatively nothing in detail except a little from her journals and from some letters" (160). Ellis, on the other hand, "had the unique advantage of knowing her intimately from 1884 to 1889, and he kept in touch with her afterwards" (160). Yet in contrast to Cronwright-Schreiner's own knowledge, Ellis's is presented as temporally limited and therefore incomplete. Cronwright-Schreiner sees himself obliged to supplement Ellis's account of Olive Schreiner, which Cronwright-Schreiner received in the form of a letter after his wife's death. Following a three-and-a-half page quotation from the letter, Cronwright-Schreiner states: "I may add to what Ellis has written on this head that, in her later attitude towards Tolstoy, she considered him a genius" (164). Ellis's relationship with Olive

Schreiner is significant as its intimacy approximates Cronwright-Schreiner's, but subsequent knowledge obtained by him supersedes Ellis's insight.

II

In order to emphasize his objectivity Cronwright-Schreiner relates an anecdote from his childhood, thus constructing his adult desire to reveal the truth as being a characteristic inherent in his nature:

My mother told me that, as a little boy (I was very ill from eighteen months to eight years), they used to try to cheer me by telling me stories; she says I would stand looking very seriously at them, 'with great dark eyes,' until they had got well on the way, when I would break in solemnly and ask: 'Is it true?' and when told it was 'just a story' would say: 'Then I don't want to hear it!' and that would end it! (227)

This anecdote exemplifies the empiricist-puritan importance given to fact over fiction as defined by Walter E. Houghton in The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870: "it is certain that Puritanism laid great stress both on hard work and on moral discipline ... and neglected, or viewed with suspicion, the worldly distractions of philosophy and art.⁵ Yet while he must be seen to attempt to represent the facts in a truthful manner, Cronwright-Schreiner must also acknowledge the significance of fiction, for his biography is only justifiable if he is able to demonstrate his subject's greatness as a writer. He therefore finds himself in a double bind: he must be seen to privilege fact, because biography, by his own empiricist definition, demands an accurate and objective reconstruction of the past. Yet he must also be seen to value fiction, that is, his wife's texts and his own "narrative" (ix). He therefore hastens to continue the above statement by adding,

[My mother] and others, looking for something to account for my love of poetry, used to speculate as to whether it was not due to the fact that, when I was so ill, they used to give me handkerchiefs with little verses on, which I soon got by heart. (227)

Cronwright-Schreiner appears to rest uneasy with his notion of subjectivity, generally constructing himself as an objective and methodical biographer throughout the text. This point of view is best exemplified in his account of his initial contact with Olive Schreiner.

His first acquaintance with the then already celebrated author occurred through his reading (in 1890) of her novel The Story of an African Farm. Prior to reading it, he states, his pursuit of the truth had led him to "ask the same question [addressed in the novel] about the religious 'facts' of Christianity: 'Is it true?'" (228). Thus, when he came to read The Story of an African Farm, he had already independently arrived at the novel's conclusions, which he deems truthful.

This observation undermines his wife's role as author and originator of the truth. Cronwright-Schreiner identifies with the characters in the novel, whom he interprets as re-enacting the struggle he has already overcome:

When one has gone through the spiritual struggle related in "The Hunter" and ... has suffered the agony of tearing from his heart the untruths planted there in his childhood, then, it seems to me, the genius of the writer must almost choke him with emotion. (231-2)

In this view narrative fiction becomes the reconstruction of the essential truth which precedes the act of writing. Further, the truth gleaned from this particular novel is not unique, but essential, and, in humanist terms, accessible to all rational individuals. Genius becomes little more than a faculty which enables an exceptional representation of the essential truth: "the

exquisite beauty of the language at its best seems to me to put [Story of an African Farm] on an equality with much of what is noblest and holiest in the English tongue" (232).

Here and elsewhere Cronwright-Schreiner emphasizes his wife's genius, referring back to his earlier definition:

It would almost seem that pronounced genius, especially of the highly imaginative order, is at times, perhaps often, accompanied by physical mannerisms, by strange emotional manifestations, and by unexpected limitations of the intellect in fields where its superb quality is not operative: as though there were an intense concentration on certain qualities and not on others, or partly at the cost of others. (34)

According to Cronwright-Schreiner, genius constitutes a faculty over which its proprietor has no control, in fact it even limits her abilities in certain areas. By this definition Olive Schreiner becomes the passive narrator of the essential truth, and not the original source of its meaning. In contrast to her function as recorder of the truth her husband advances himself as an objective biographer who is able to control meaning and accurately reproduce the facts.

III

Cronwright-Schreiner's scientific approach to biography writing becomes evident in his method of accumulating facts. Detailed descriptions of the fauna of the veld (25-6, 106, 231) give the impression of careful accuracy, while at the same time they create an atmosphere and connect the various periods of the subject's life. Even more importantly they foreshadow the culmination of Cronwright-Schreiner's career as a natural scientist: the discovery of a previously unknown species of spider (334-5). Cronwright-Schreiner's meticulous gathering--he collected over four thousand spiders, solifugae and scorpions

while living at Hanover--becomes a metaphor for the production of the biography.

When describing his work at Hanover, Cronwright-Schreiner refers to his prior experience in the field: "the work was not entirely new to me" (338). He makes the same claim with regard to his prior knowledge of his biographical subject, and with regard to his early recognition of the truth presented in The Story of an African Farm. He had been the first scientist to collect the area around Hanover ("That part of the country had never been 'collected'" [338]), and the first biographer to reconstruct Olive Schreiner's life. His position as the first scientist/biographer in these fields of discovery forms the basis of his authority. Thus he states that the result of his collection of spiders, solifugae and scorpions was to throw "a great deal of light on certain points" (338), and previously accepted facts had to be reassessed with regard to his new discovery.

In Cronwright-Schreiner's opinion, his biography represents the only true account of Olive Schreiner's life. In light of his wife's unusual personality he claims he "had to face the inevitable fact that she would be misunderstood and misrepresented, unless the only person who ever had an opportunity of knowing her thoroughly should make the attempt to delineate her personality" (viii). Accordingly, his biography and his collection represent the definitive works in their respective fields. Of his biography Cronwright-Schreiner claims, "The result [of my research] has been, I think it may be claimed, an unusually complete record from [Olive Schreiner's] birth to her death" (ix). With regard to his scientific research he writes that "Dr. Purcell told me it was the best of all up-country collections" (338).

The new genus of spider which Cronwright-Schreiner discovered was later named after him "*Seothyra schreineri*, a very interesting little creature" (335). By Toril Moi's definition, Cronwright-Schreiner thus presents himself as fathering his discovery. She writes:

In this humanist ideology the self is the *sole author* of history and of the literary text: the humanist creator is potent, phallic and male--God in relation to his world, the author in relation to his text.⁶

The notion of having created the spider becomes emphasized in the biography's index, where the spider gains a status equal to that of Cronwright-Schreiner's only child, who died sixteen hours after her birth. The index reads "Baby, 274" and later "Spiders, 338". By implication Cronwright-Schreiner's role becomes analogous to God's act of Creation, while Adam's act of naming His creatures is assigned to others: "[it was] named later by the South African Museum authority on the subject" (335). By appropriating the role of father/God, Cronwright-Schreiner, through the same creative process, becomes the sole author of his character "Olive Schreiner." However, the appropriation of this dominant role is undermined by the fact that the spider was given his wife's name, not his.

Cronwright-Schreiner's name becomes, for him, a site of contention. He introduces himself into the biography by declaring: "Those interested in Olive Schreiner will desire to know something about her husband.... My name is Samuel Cron Cronwright" (226). The use of his ancestral name at this point constitutes an attempt to assert his individuality and independence. At the time of his marriage to Olive Schreiner, and upon her request, he had changed it to "Cronwright-Schreiner." Paradoxically, in the process of rewriting himself as an autonomous individual through his earlier name "Cronwright" (226), Cronwright-Schreiner distances himself from both products of his research, which each bear his wife's name (*[Seothyra] schreineri* and [The Life of Olive Schreiner] by Samuel Cron Cronwright-Schreiner). Cronwright-Schreiner's attempt to free himself from his wife is undermined. In order to present himself as an autonomous author he must refer to the objects he had produced. However, these not only bear his wife's name, but are indeed inseparable from it. Cronwright-Schreiner's resulting dependence on her name thus causes the construction

of the character "Samuel Cron Cronwright(-Schreiner)," who is at once separate and inseparable from the character "Olive Schreiner."

IV

The South African and British communities in which Cronwright-Schreiner and his wife lived and wrote were determined by patriarchal ideology and puritan work ethics. These world-views saw the male as patriarch governing his wife and children, and as empowered through his access to public life.⁷ In puritan societies, work is considered the means of gaining respectability and salvation. The success of the working individual is measured in monetary terms, and poverty is deemed a symbol of failure (Houghton 189, 191).

Cronwright-Schreiner emphasizes his wife's high status in public life, but he also declares her incapable of gaining financial security, and as posing a threat to her and her husband's respectability and salvation: "We were rushing on to ruin, for I was earning nothing, and was exhausting my little capital to give her the chance she asked for. Yet she seemed quite oblivious of this and could not see the approaching catastrophe" (287). Cronwright-Schreiner acknowledges his wife's need to maintain financial independence, and interprets her failure to do so as a result of "ill-health and inability to work" (362n1). He describes his own financial success as the product of hard work, consistency, and self-sacrifice, all deemed virtues in puritan discourse: "starting afresh late in life, what I had accomplished had been achieved only by the most rigid and exclusive concentration on my business" (374). In this manner, Olive Schreiner's insolvency is shown to be the effect of uncontrollable forces acting upon her, while her husband's ability to support her and himself ("I assisted her financially ... my bankers sent her remittances regularly" [362]) becomes, by contrast, indicative of his success as acting subject in control of his destiny.

Olive Schreiner's inability to support herself is construed as a direct result of her subversive lifestyle. The traditional perception of the wife's role in marriage is summarised in Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex:

She takes [her husband's] name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his 'half'. She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband's universe; she gives him her person.... Since the husband is the productive worker, he is the one who goes beyond family interest to that of society.... Woman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home.⁸

Olive Schreiner rejected the traditional roles of a wife. As shown, she refused to take her husband's name, asking him instead to take hers--an action which caused him to join her family. Cronwright-Schreiner quotes from a letter he received from her:

I would like to take your name instead of mine if I married you, only I am known by mine everywhere. Do you think it would be very strange if we were 'Cronwright Schreiner?' It would be so beautiful if we could have one name. People would understand that it was because I had written books, and Will and Fred [her brothers] and all would love to have you have the name we have. I should like us to have one name. (256)

Yet after their marriage Olive Schreiner continued to use the name "Olive Schreiner," despite the fact that her husband adopted hers. While she shared her husband's religious beliefs (they were both "freethinkers"), Cronwright-Schreiner entered her class and circle, giving up his future as a farmer (272), and becoming politically active together with his wife ("We both urged again and again on prominent statesmen that war was being worked for" [290]). Her frequent trips away from him

undermined the conventional role of the wife, who was expected to surrender her life and person to her husband and his career. Finally, Olive Schreiner was unable to fulfil her role as "continuer of the species."

By acknowledging his wife's greatness and her noncompliance with patriarchally assigned female roles, Cronwright-Schreiner runs the risk of being understood as an emasculated male. In Sexual Subversions Elizabeth Grosz claims,

Lacan's concept of the phallus explains how men and women rationalise their identities as masculine or feminine with reference to biology.... The masculine is positioned as *having* the phallus by virtue of his illusory conflation of the organ (the penis) with the signifier (the phallus). The feminine is positioned as *being* the phallus by virtue of her anatomical sex being regarded as the absence or loss of the (male) organ.... She becomes the phallus ... by becoming desirable for him, confirming that he has what she lacks (and thus wants).⁹

The woman who appropriates the male phallic role provokes in her male other the fear of castration, for,

... no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself ... the subject can be posed only in being opposed--he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object. (de Beauvoir 17)

In order to re-establish his position as authoring male after his wife's death, Cronwright-Schreiner must construct himself as virile and potent, as in possession of the phallus, in opposition to his wife's lack. In so doing he responds to an audience which he views as defining him as emasculated. However, Cronwright-Schreiner is a product of that very society which he regards as condemning him. His need to present his autonomous subject-position consequently forces him to duplicate even more

emphatically the very ideology which caused his condemnation in the first instance. Therefore the subject-position formulated by Cronwright-Schreiner in his biography is both product and producer of patriarchal ideology.

V

Cronwright-Schreiner defines himself in opposition to the characteristics he attributes to Olive Schreiner's genius. He presents a traditionally male self which is rational (not of the "highly imaginative order"), physically sound (not given to particular "physical mannerisms"), emotionally stable (not prone to "strange emotional manifestations") and intellectually unlimited. His own scientific method of research--the result of which is his biography--becomes superior to her impulsive, intuitive and quasi-involuntary genius, which is shown to be a manifestation of female passivity, multiplicity, and subjectivity: "Olive was in herself ... all kinds of persons; she had only to take one of these ... and draw it, for it to be astonishingly true to such character when you found it apart from herself" (174).

Cronwright-Schreiner frequently alludes to his wife's inability to obtain knowledge through his definition of empirical, logical reasoning. Her mind learnt "by reading and thought and not mechanically ... no school would teach Olive anything ... it would be almost impossible to divert her from her own thoughts or compel her mind to do anything" (72, 87). This is emphasized in his discussion of the "sex book" his wife claimed to have been working on for many years, and which Cronwright-Schreiner claims, did not exist. He explains that,

Indeed, such a work was quite beyond the scope of her powers.... Such a book would have meant hard, exact, systematic reading and study, and a collection and tabulation of exact scientific facts, a kind of labour she was incapable of. (356)

Rather, her writing was a "setting forth of her long brooded-over thought" as opposed to (his own) painstaking accumulation of scientific facts, "detailed study," and "systematic reading," of which he alleges she was incapable (359).

According to her husband, Olive Schreiner was not only incapable of meticulous scientific research, but was unable to perceive and adhere to the truth (as he defines it) at all. He maintains that her powerful imagination sometimes induced her to "manufacture the missing 'facts,' in which case they became more real to her than the facts themselves" (237). Her imagination, the idealist medium of genius, was a separate faculty over which she had no control: "the greatest facts for her were not the hard facts of life, but were the 'facts' of her powerful imagination ... her capacity for stating hard, objective facts was often conditioned by her powerful imagination" (271, 354). This is interpreted as a characteristic which Olive Schreiner shared with her mother, whose imagination "sometimes distorted facts" (298).

In order to re-establish his position as male author of her life, Cronwright-Schreiner must subjugate his subject's authority as a writer. He does this by emphasizing her inability to write (265, 286, 301, 311, 356), to spell (68, 87-8, 120, 195, 238), and to punctuate correctly (68, 238). On one occasion he relates his and his brother's vital contribution to the completion of his wife's essay, "A South African's View of the Situation": "Of course we should never have presumed so to deal with a work of imagination of hers, nor would she have wished it, but this pamphlet dealt with facts and had to be finished.... I doubt whether it would have been completed otherwise" (311). But the most forceful exposure of his wife's relative disempowerment and lack occurs in opposition to Cronwright-Schreiner's own most active writing period.

Olive Schreiner was unable to live up to her husband's expectations. He had dreamed of becoming the mentor and patron of South Africa's then most celebrated writer:

... far down below lay the farm-house to which she had come as a happy bride only three months before and which, there was but little doubt, was soon to be left for ever, all our plans--hers of writing in that quiet house, away from the world ... and mine of continuing with the farm to afford her a home and those conditions under which she could work--shattered within a few months. (267-8)

The climate at the farm aggravated Olive Schreiner's asthma to the extent that the couple was forced to leave. Cronwright-Schreiner conceded to his wife's ill-health against his better judgement and under the understanding that she would complete two novels in the subsequent two years:

... she said that, if she had two years there [at the Homestead in Kimberley], she would finish her two 'big' novels, From Man to Man and The Buddhist Priest's Wife, which she calculated would bring in £30,000 and make us independent. (271)

According to Cronwright-Schreiner, the work she produced during that period was unsatisfactory:

She wrote Peter Halkett, but she did not write any of the books mentioned, and they were not finished even at her death.... She did not seem to remember that I had taken the grave step of giving up my livelihood at her special request in order that she might finish and publish The Buddhist Priest's Wife and From Man to Man. (287)

Cronwright-Schreiner had given up his livelihood with the best of intentions:

... I must say that, apart from my love and reverence for her, I have always felt, as a kind of religion, that I had her as a trust, and that, at whatever cost, it was my duty to give her, as far as lay in my power, the opportunity to complete her work as a great artist and one of spiritual insight. (271)

His understandable disappointment is the result of his lack of understanding of his wife's literary capabilities. The conditions under which he had sacrificed his farming career had constrained her to write specific texts, novels which her husband hoped would supersede her first most successful novel, The Story of an African Farm. The texts she did produce during the two years were not the ones Cronwright-Schreiner believed her capable of. His disappointment is reflected in his judgement of them:

It will be seen in Stories, Dreams, and Allegories, that not only is The Buddhist Priest's Wife not a big novel, but that it cannot properly even be styled a novel; it is merely a 'short story'--very good indeed in my opinion--but nothing else. (287n1)

Cronwright-Schreiner uses his wife's unproductiveness as a vehicle to demonstrate his own productivity:

While at The Homestead I wrote an article on the Trekbokke ... and another on the Ostrich, both published in the Zoologist.... The article upset a number of accepted scientific 'facts.' I also wrote a book, The Angora Goat.... I also won the first prize in the open essay competition inaugurated by the proprietors of the British and South Africa Export Gazette.... So that I was not idle. (287)

Surreptitiously he incorporates his Land of Free Speech into the biography, initially in a brief footnote ("These De Aar incidents are taken from my Land of Free Speech" [314n1]), then in a somewhat longer footnote which supports Cronwright-Schreiner's

description of his wife's failure to produce written texts. In the main text he quotes from a letter written to him by Olive Schreiner: "It's much the best speech you have ever made in one sense.... I've made three African stories now about the war which I'm going to write out as soon as the book (Stray Thoughts) is ready" (319). In the footnote the biographer adds: "For my speech referred to above, see page 260 of The Land of Free Speech. None of the three stories or any trace of them was found among her papers. She no doubt had 'made' them only in her mind" (319n1).

Finally, his book takes a prime position within the main body of the text: "As a full account of this great meeting [a protest meeting at Worcester] is given in my book, The Land of Free Speech, Chapter XXIX, I shall not attempt to write another account, but refer the reader to that" (323). Thus the reader is referred to Cronwright-Schreiner's text, which he implies contains an accurate account of the true events.

Throughout the biography, in keeping with the ideology which prevailed at the time of its conception, authority and objectivity are presented as male domains in opposition to the female domain of fiction. Women are deemed unreliable sources of "hard, objective facts." Olive Schreiner and her mother are reproduced as fixed female types with a "brilliancy of intellect" (22), although Olive Schreiner had been endowed with "something added which neither parents nor brothers nor sisters had at all" (34)--her genius. Both women had been great storytellers, and this quality is recognized and fostered by Cronwright-Schreiner: "Mrs. Schreiner wrote as well as she spoke and in the same gay, penetrating, humorous way. I used to beg her to write down an account of her South African life; it would have been a delight" (24). The biographer lays claim to a superior ability to judge good writing and genius, which validates his self-imposed role as Olive Schreiner's mentor and author. By appropriating this role, Cronwright-Schreiner writes his subject as a "perfectly helpless human being," a "defenceless person" (239) in need of (male) care, a passive being who needed to be

"shielded and protected from the outside world" (102), and as a woman who was "unfitted for the struggle of life [and] ill-qualified for the work-a-day world as almost anyone could be" (100).

VI

During her lifetime Olive Schreiner resisted this version of herself, failing to write the novels her husband had sponsored, and insisting on her independence from him. But after her death Cronwright-Schreiner is able to fully author his text with his wife as its object. The resulting biography presents him as a vital contributor to her greatness. Recreating his first meeting with Olive Schreiner he writes: "I remember the huge delight of the Cawoods at seeing and hearing her more powerful and brilliant than they could possibly have seen or heard her before" (234). He defines her as emotionally and intellectually dependent on him by claiming that she wrote to him from Hanover that she would die without his letters. Cronwright-Schreiner states he had occasionally sent her articles he had written which she carried about with her "reading them over and over" (327). He presents himself as trustee of her genius: "in Olive I had a sacred trust ... I had her as a trust" (269, 271). As her mentor and sole sponsor he had repeatedly attempted to provide her with "those conditions under which she could work" (268). He substantiates her reliance on him when he pronounces: "I am the only person who ever lived any length of time with her alone; I think she never had the feeling of wishing to get away from me" (318). As Cronwright-Schreiner sees it, her dependence on him becomes unmistakable, for she "did not like lengthened isolation and loneliness ... notwithstanding the fact that much solitude was essential to her calm and happiness" (318).

This last claim acts as an explanation for Olive Schreiner's long and frequent absences from her husband without compromising his privileged position as her husband/author. The biographer presents her need to travel as an involuntary manifestation of her independent genius: "Neither could Olive

stay long with people, even with those she loved; she had to get away and be quite free" (184). The fear of being perceived as rejected by his wife parallels the biographer's fear of emasculation. Cronwright-Schreiner's priority in the biography becomes the reaffirmation of his masculinity, and images of his physical prowess abound (for example, his description of himself as a young man [226-9]). These are supported by references to his hunting achievements ("I shot a buffalo" [18]; "I shot one of the last [leopards]" [106]) and the use of a hunting metaphor to describe his research methods ("Having got on his spoor ..." [83]). He emphasizes his capability as a farmer, thus countering in advance any possible subversion of his patriarchal role:

[The farm] had been unremunerative to him [its owner] for the thirty years before my advent, and it was solely because it had become a success that he had made it a big thing ... as a matter of fact, the farm never paid him afterwards. (269)

Further, he justifies his adoption of Olive Schreiner's surname by negating the significance of names: "I would have done more for her [than take her name] ... after all, names are useful merely as identification tablets" (256-7).

Although he admits his wife had been older and therefore more experienced than he was when they met, Cronwright-Schreiner maintains that he had quickly attained his wife's level of intellect:

It was a pretty severe gruelling I had for a year or two [immediately after their marriage], but it was what I needed, and it did me good; up against such a powerful and quick and (even when wrong) such a subtle intellect, I learnt to examine my premises very carefully before joining issue with her until at last it was not such a one-sided game as it had been at the beginning. (240)

Cronwright-Schreiner describes his own mental development in male terms: "Like a trained athlete, I became able to use such faculties as I had to the best advantage" (240). The culmination of his training is the present biography, which in turn becomes vehicle and metaphor for the re-affirmation of his own masculinity. The act of authoring the person who had encouraged his intellectual faculty in the first place represents Cronwright-Schreiner's ultimate control over his wife and her writing. Assertively he redefines himself as an independent individual: "My name is Samuel Cron Cronwright" (226). In "Appendix C. Report on Post-mortem" Olive Schreiner is named "the Late Mrs. Cronwright-Schreiner" (390), thus becoming the appropriate and appropriated wife and other of the authoring biographer. The biography becomes both the product and the site of production of Cronwright-Schreiner's self-determined masculinity, while his other is redefined as the void which is death.

Notes

¹ Although not published until 1924, Cronwright-Schreiner dated his preface "October 1923," suggesting that the biography had been completed less than three years after his wife's death in December 1920.

² Meintjes states: "When Cronwright came to write his Life and began to compile the Letters, the Schreiner family felt rightly that it was too soon after Olive's death, and refused co-operation.... Cronwright was too impatient to wait, so when the volume appeared, it made the impression that the only two men who featured in Olive's life were Ellis and Cronwright, which we now know not to be the case at all" (Johannes Meitjes, Olive Schreiner. Portrait of a South African Woman [Johannesburg: Keartland, 1965] 98).

³ Roland Barthes, "Structural Analysis of Narratives," Image-Music-Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 111.

⁴ Wallace Martin, Recent Theories of Narrative (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1986). As discussed in Chapter One, Wallace Martin claims: "the committed

realist holds that [his] point of view is *true*, and that others are, if not false, at least seriously distorted" (61).

⁵ Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985) 126.

⁶ Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 8. Here Moi is presenting the views of french feminists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous.

⁷ For a detailed discussion see Susan Kingsley Kent's chapter entitled "Marriage" in Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 80-113.

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (London: Picador, 1988) 449.

⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions. Three French Feminists (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989) 20-1.

CHAPTER THREE

Johannes Meintjes: The Anxiety of Castration

I

Meintjes's mode of presenting his protagonist is the product of patriarchal discourse, which characterizes the male in terms of his capacity to look, and the female in terms of her ability to attract the male gaze. This view is in keeping with the notion of the male as active and powerful in contrast to female passivity and disempowerment. Thus the male comes to represent the Lacanian phallus, a term which is "used by Lacan to designate all of those values which are opposed to lack."¹ The phallus is the "signifier for the cultural privileges and positive values which define male subjectivity within patriarchal society, but from which the female subject remains isolated" (Silverman 183). Lacking the ability to appropriate the phallus, the female comes to represent male castration. Meintjes's biography exemplifies this process, as his subject comes to signify lack, thus presenting herself as a void to be filled by the voyeuristic male (Silverman 222-3). As authoring phallic male, Meintjes takes possession of his female subject, presenting her as the object of his gaze.

Unlike Cronwright-Schreiner, who places his emphasis on Olive Schreiner's genius, Meintjes draws attention to her physical appearance. Apart from referring to eyewitness reports in order to validate his subject's beauty (6, 9, 17, 18, 25, 40), Meintjes substantiates these observations by examining a photograph:

Olive first went on a visit to her mother at Seymour, passing through Queenstown where she had herself photographed. This photograph shows a young woman of extraordinary beauty, with dark curly hair tied at the back, large dreamy dark eyes, an exquisite nose and a good mouth. She left Seymour on horseback. (40)

Olive Schreiner is described by Meintjes in the same terms as one would use to describe a horse ("exquisite nose, good mouth"), suggesting that he views her as an object able to be possessed and dominated.

References to Olive Schreiner's beauty become less frequent as the biography progresses, and as the subject develops from a beautiful child and girl to a middle-aged woman, "rather plump" (83), whose asthma had "told on her appearance, hunching her shoulders and making her cough wheezily" (115). Her decline in beauty correlates to her increasing inability to write and to act rationally, an interpretation which is based on a traditional physiognomical approach. The "vacillating moods" (32) of the girl become the 26-year-old's "restless spirit, her sensitivity, her lack of perseverance, and her many temperamental complexities" (46). By the time she leaves South Africa for the last time she is presented as having deteriorated into an aging woman who is described as "imperious, intolerant and extremely difficult to get on with. It would also seem that her increasing use of drugs occasionally left her in such a state that she did not know what she was doing" (178). She had also become obsessed with her age: "Her letters reveal a steadily waxing age-obsession" (159). In Meintjes's view Olive Schreiner's physical and mental decline correlate to her sexuality, which he exposes as having become increasingly deviant.

II

Meintjes's stance towards Olive Schreiner's sexuality is ambivalent. While he is obliged to delineate it within patriarchal discourse--from which he cannot escape--he appears unable to define her sexuality in traditional ideological terms. Meintjes's unease is evidenced in his presentation of Olive Schreiner as a "monster woman," as defined by Toril Moi in her book Sexual/Textual Politics. Moi defines this fictional character as the expression of a latent male fear of femininity:

The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who *has* a story to tell--in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her.²

Prior to her first sexual encounter, Olive Schreiner's eccentricities are formulated by Meintjes as proof of her exceptional character: "It is no doubt this 'eccentricity' which made her so well remembered, for she was like no other Victorian girl of her time" (18). After her initiation through her affair with Julius Gau, her eccentricity becomes a negative factor, and an expression of her increasingly unconstrainable sexual desire: "her sexual nature now having been awakened, she experienced a mounting of desire which she tried to lull by large quantities of potassium bromide" (22). Her sexuality deteriorates from healthy to deviant ("she had a healthy sexual appetite" [70], "Olive was a highly sexed woman with strong desires" [73]) until her sexual "problem" becomes an obsession:

She did not really give up her search for an ideal love and no doubt she considered every interesting man she met as a possible husband.... But as yet there was no solution to her sexual frustration, and the scores of brilliant young men who paid court to her must have made her problem even more vexing. (86)

Meintjes claims further that his subject had lesbian tendencies (appropriating Ellis's clinical term "inversion"³ he euphemizes lesbianism as "inverted tendencies" [14, 57]), and suggests she had a sado-masochistic affair on the Isle of Wight (60). Yet Meintjes, who himself presents his subject as deviant, subverts this claim when critiquing Cronwright-Schreiner's biography (written with Ellis's assistance):

It has been suggested ... that Cronwright's Life and the volume of Letters show a conspiracy between Havelock Ellis and Cronwright to denigrate Olive.... The suggestion could have been ignored, but for the fact that the Life and Letters seem to substantiate the inference.... Olive Schreiner, despite her many psychosomatic disorders, was a sane, a brilliant, a brave and commonsensical woman, and the misrepresentation that resulted one can only explain as a sad lack of understanding. (166)

Meintjes insists on defining his protagonist (and indeed all his characters) according to a patriarchal definition of sexuality. Unable to present an unambiguous image of Olive Schreiner as a healthy, sane, and commonsensical woman throughout the biography, his affirmation of her brilliance and sanity in juxtaposition to Cronwright-Schreiner's and Ellis's "misrepresentation" appears as a single and somewhat contrived attempt to produce a unified, straightforward and compliant subject. It also serves to validate and emphasize Meintjes's dominance over both his subject and her original biographers.

III

Meintjes constructs his narrative in terms of a dialogue between himself and potential contending male authors. In The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir describes the dynamics between groups of men in primitive patriarchal societies:

Society has always been male; political power has always been in the hands of men.... For the male it is always another male who is the fellow being, the other who is also the same, with whom reciprocal relations are established. The duality that appears within societies under one form or another opposes a group of men to a group of men.⁴

Analogous to the opposition of male groups to one another in primitive societies, Meintjes--the individual biographer--positions

other individual males in opposition to himself. Each opponent is defined hierarchically according to the level of his power in relationship to the biographer. The opponent's power is measured in terms of his sexual potency. Within this structure, Cronwright-Schreiner poses the greatest threat to Meintjes's authority, Havelock Ellis represents a non-threatening, but significant opponent and Edward Carpenter appears conspicuous by his absence in the biography, despite Meintjes's affirmations with regard to his importance in Olive Schreiner's life.

Cronwright-Schreiner is defined as a most powerful and potent male character in an assertion which Meintjes makes in order to contain Olive Schreiner's deviant sexuality by subordinating it to her husband's control:

Olive was a highly sexed woman with strong desires.... Her eventual marriage to a man of whose virility she was extremely proud, substantiates it.... Olive was genuinely fascinated by Cronwright's virility, even the primitive aspect of it. (73, 116)

But Meintjes emphasizes Cronwright-Schreiner's virility only in order to demonstrate its decline. As will be shown, the catalyst causing Cronwright-Schreiner's gradual emasculation is his genius wife.

Of the male characters in Meintjes's biography, the most glowing attributes are awarded to Havelock Ellis:

The greatness of Havelock Ellis the man, scientist and artist has perhaps not yet been fully assessed. To most people he is merely known as one of the authorities on the psychology of sex, whereas his work in the field of literature is not generally known.... His literary studies are excellent ... one can only approach the power and scope of his intellect with the most profound admiration. (65)

The assertion of Ellis's superior intellect is supported by references to his influence on Olive Schreiner's writing and thought:

[Olive Schreiner] was already a bit alarmed at Ellis's erudition and critical penetration, which by far exceeded anything she was capable of, and wrote her replies [to his letters] with unusual care.... Her critical sense, no doubt as a result of Ellis's influence, was becoming much sharper.... She was extremely nervous about Ellis's reaction to her new work, for however much she disagreed with him, she knew that he was a sound critic. (67, 85)

Yet conversely, Meintjes categorizes Ellis's sexuality in terms of lack: "This then was Ellis's problem: he was impotent. He had reached a stage where he accepted it ... and he yearned for a woman who would accept it too, and yet share his life with him" (72). In Meintjes's hierarchy, Ellis becomes a non-threatening opponent, unable to author Olive Schreiner, and capable only of recording her medical history: "[Ellis] was familiar with case-histories, and so, under his influence, The Life of Olive Schreiner became little more than a case-history covering 414 pages" (166). As a mere reporter of his first-hand experience of Olive Schreiner, Ellis's function as co-author of the Life is presented in female terms, for traditionally women "could not transcend, but only record, the concerns of the private self."⁵

In Meintjes's narrative Ellis recedes behind the virile original biographer, influencing Cronwright-Schreiner, but unable to originate the text. This places Ellis in an emasculated position which is symbolic of Meintjes's own fear of being overshadowed by Cronwright-Schreiner. In order to avoid castration Meintjes must prove Cronwright-Schreiner's text inaccurate and insufficient. In so doing he displays the fear of Harold Bloom's "ephebe" poet who recognizes that "poetic misprision ... is individually a sin ... against the only authority that matters, property or the priority of having named something first. Poetry

is property, as politics is property."⁶ For a large proportion of the biography Meintjes remains locked in Bloom's revisionary ratio of *kenosis*, at once subverting Cronwright-Schreiner's authority and using his Life as the basis of his own work. His subtextual theme--the gradual decline of the original biographer--displays a fixation with and within this fear, which Meintjes is unable to transcend.

IV

Meintjes's anxiety of castration manifests itself in his solidarity with Ellis when the latter is rejected as a potential husband by Olive Schreiner. Ellis becomes the victim of an atypical, aggressive woman, of the "monster woman":

As [Olive] had already taken the lead, she would now pursue it to its logical conclusion. Given love and reassurance ... [Ellis] would overcome his difficulties.... Olive [tried] to teach him the physical art of love, but with no success. She became more and more frustrated.... As time went by Olive became even repelled by the thought of kissing him. Ellis, on the other hand, loved her only more, hopelessly and desperately. (73)

In contrast to Olive Schreiner's abnormal, masculine behaviour, Ellis is presented as passive: "He had now decided Olive was the woman he had waited for all his life; he trusted her absolutely; he had fallen in love as never before" (72). But Olive Schreiner rejected his marriage proposal (83) choosing a man "of whose virility she was extremely proud" (73). Her refusal becomes Meintjes's proof of Ellis's lack in opposition to Cronwright-Schreiner's endowment, and it is supported by Olive Schreiner's act of choosing the possessing male over the deficient one. Thus Meintjes subjugates his protagonist by placing her on a continuum. She is shown to be more masculine than the emasculated Ellis but mastered by Cronwright-Schreiner, who at first appears as the archetypical, virile male.

Olive Schreiner's relationship with Edward Carpenter is dealt with in a far more perfunctory manner than her friendship with Ellis. Carpenter was a self-proclaimed homosexual: "He was quite open about his homosexuality, wrote a book on the subject" (77). As a homosexual Carpenter not only poses no threat to Meintjes, but is already excluded from patriarchal discourse. This becomes most evident in the biographer's description of Carpenter's role in Olive Schreiner's life. Having introduced Carpenter briefly, Meintjes describes his relationship to Olive Schreiner:

... people who knew them ... thought she had fallen in love with him ... and no doubt there was a mutual misunderstanding as to what the one wanted from the other. She pursued him to his rustic retreat, but Carpenter fled, not returning till after she had gone. (78)

Meintjes adds in a footnote: "[their mutual misunderstanding] did not last long. In the end they became firm friends and almost as many letters passed between Olive and Carpenter as between Ellis and herself" (78n). Yet in spite of placing Carpenter at a level of importance almost equal to that of Ellis, Meintjes deals only marginally with Carpenter's relationship to Olive Schreiner, confining the significant part of their friendship to the footnote, that is, literally to the margin of the text. Elsewhere Meintjes declares that "In some ways, once they understood each other, Edward Carpenter was a warmer friend to Olive than Ellis ever was ... and his role in her life was far greater than is generally supposed" (87). But here also, he refrains from discussing Carpenter's role in detail, implying that Carpenter's homosexuality renders him an insignificant (non)adversary within Meintjes's hierarchy.

V

Much of Meintjes's biography consists of unreferenced passages cited almost verbatim from Cronwright-Schreiner's sources. Yet while he appropriates his predecessor's text,

Meintjes also subverts the earlier biographer's authority. In so doing Meintjes engages in Bloom's ratio of *clinamen* ,

... which is poetic misreading or misprision proper.... A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute ... a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves. (Bloom 14)

An interesting case in point is Meintjes's description of Cronwright-Schreiner taken from the latter's own description of himself. Meintjes's considerably shorter account consists of paraphrased sentences from Cronwright-Schreiner's Life of Olive Schreiner. These appear in the same sequence in Meintjes's text as in the Life. However, the two interpretations of Cronwright-Schreiner's first meeting with Olive Schreiner--the first by her husband, the second by Meintjes--are quite discordant:

It is certain she was curious to see me; the Cawoods must have told her a deal of myth. In a letter given later she refers to this moment. I can remember no interval; like lightning we seemed in the midst of a conversation; I think the others said hardly a word. I remember the huge delight of the Cawoods at seeing and hearing her more powerful and brilliant than they could possibly have seen or heard her before. I had never seen anything like it, nor have I since, except from her. It was a miracle in the quiet Karoo house. (Life 234)

Meintjes paraphrases and quotes:

Hardly had they met, when they were plunged into conversation, the others listening quietly. Olive was used to adoring young men and knew how to handle them. 'I remember the huge delight of the Cawoods at seeing and hearing her more powerful and brilliant then (sic) they

could possibly have seen or heard her before,' Cronwright remarks. 'I had never seen anything like it, nor have I since, except from her. It was a miracle in the quiet Karoo house.' (115)

The subtle subversion of Cronwright-Schreiner's account is contained in the claim that Olive was "used to adoring young men and knew how to handle them," which somewhat denigrates Cronwright-Schreiner's extravagant account of being instantly struck by her genius. Meintjes redefines the episode by constructing Cronwright-Schreiner as the victim of an experienced older woman. Cronwright-Schreiner's fascination, which both biographers insist was not "love at first sight," is trivialised as he becomes an "adoring young man," and only one of many. This assertion is reinforced elsewhere by Meintjes: "[Olive Schreiner] had married an average male, no saint" (137).

Meintjes subverts Cronwright-Schreiner's own claim to exceptionality (through his ability to recognize genius), and influence (under which she becomes "more powerful and brilliant" than she ever can have been previously). Meintjes places himself in the superior position of an omniscient narrator, able to objectively analyse the perceptions of both characters, as opposed to Cronwright-Schreiner's first person, overtly subjective narrative position. Meintjes shows both characters interacting on the same level of narration, thus appropriating a point of view which exhibits him as superior because more distant and therefore more objective. In Bloom's terms, this constitutes his corrective movement with regard to his precursor's text. The stance he takes refers back to his preface, where he states: "My aim throughout has been a completely objective approach."

VI

Meintjes subverts Cronwright-Schreiner's authority by quoting from a letter (unreferenced) from one Sir William Mackenzie to Mary Brown, Olive Schreiner's close personal

friend. In this letter, Mackenzie claims that Cronwright-Schreiner had made too little of his wife's unselfishness in helping others: "Perhaps her husband did not know what she did in this direction, for I fancy she was not one to publish her good deeds," wrote Mackenzie (93). The presentation of this quotation can be read as serving to alert the reader to Cronwright-Schreiner's inability to fully know his subject.

Meintjes undermines the authorship of his precursor, and validates this action by soliciting the cooperation of another critic. In Bloom's terms, this process is that of *tessera*, or the antithetical completion of the precursor's poem. While the earlier poem is acknowledged by the "ephebe" poet (Meintjes continues to quote from and paraphrase sections of Cronwright-Schreiner's biography), he also attempts to prove that his predecessor had failed to go far enough. Both the content of Mackenzie's letter, which highlights Cronwright-Schreiner's limitations, and the addition of the letter to Meintjes's text, suggest the unavoidable incompleteness of Cronwright-Schreiner's Life.

As shown in Chapter Two, Cronwright-Schreiner had been, according to Meintjes, too impatient to wait to publish his Life, so that "when the volume appeared, it made the impression that the only two men who featured in Olive's life were Ellis and Cronwright, which we now know not to be the case at all" (98). Meintjes sees it as his role to rectify this misrepresentation: "But seeing that [Olive Schreiner's] privacy has been violated, the only alternative is to tell the truth" (98).

Meintjes reprehends Cronwright-Schreiner's detailed description of his wife's eccentricities ("Cronwright makes too much of her eccentricities" [79]). However, this criticism occurs precisely at the end of Meintjes's own paraphrase of Cronwright-Schreiner's description, which shows Olive Schreiner's absent-mindedness while working, and her habit of chewing up telegrams and railway tickets. While denigrating Cronwright-Schreiner's emphasis on these events, Meintjes himself adds further details of his subject's eccentricities, presumably also gleaned from Cronwright-Schreiner's Life:

Cronwright has been severely criticised for mentioning matters such as these in his biography, critics considering them irrelevant (as also his description of her beating her fists on walls and banging her head on tables), but it is of interest, although Cronwright makes too much of her eccentricities. (79)

Meintjes vacillates between a position of loyalty to, and criticism of his opponent. Initially he alerts the reader to the possibility of defining Cronwright-Schreiner as indiscreet ("Cronwright has been severely criticised"). He then distances himself from that criticism by placing the responsibility for such a claim with other critics ("critics considering them irrelevant"). In addition he surreptitiously supports and follows Cronwright-Schreiner's practice of including such details ("as also his description of her beating her fists on walls and banging her head on tables"), and justifies Cronwright-Schreiner's--and therefore his own--inclusion of the material ("it is of interest"). He concludes by condemning Cronwright-Schreiner's emphasis on Olive Schreiner's eccentricities ("[he] makes too much of [them]").

Meintjes at once endorses and recriminates Cronwright-Schreiner's presentation of his subject, thus

... emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, [and seeming] to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems. (Bloom 14-15)

In this passage Meintjes can be observed as shifting from one subject- position to another--from "ephebe" to "strong" poet, from father to son--as he attempts to "undo" his precursor and to "isolate" his self from the precursor's stance (Bloom 88).

VII

Meintjes's criticism of Cronwright-Schreiner becomes more evident and more direct as his narrative proceeds. In the introduction to Woman and Labour Olive Schreiner had claimed that the manuscript of her "sex-book" had been destroyed in Johannesburg during the Anglo-Boer War. Meintjes concurs with Cronwright-Schreiner, who, as already discussed, denied the book's existence. Meintjes writes:

Olive's statement [in Woman and Labour] led to a considerable distortion not only of the facts but of her capabilities, placing her in a false light. Cronwright, such a stickler for truth and exactitude in all matters, makes much of a lapse such as this. (150)

While he agrees with Cronwright-Schreiner's view, Meintjes nevertheless subverts the earlier biographer's authority, claiming Cronwright-Schreiner overemphasized this point, for, in the final analysis "It is of minor importance whether Olive wrote a lost book called Woman" (150).

The reader, claims Meintjes, "is often irritated by [Cronwright-Schreiner's] painstaking efforts to correct even the most trivial inaccuracies in her letters, journal and general writings and statements" (150). Cronwright-Schreiner is also accused of exploiting his authorial position by judiciously editing Olive Schreiner's written texts (69, 81). Meintjes is particularly harsh in his overall assessment of Cronwright-Schreiner's Life:

Although an exhaustive work, containing the fruits of much laborious research, it fails as a biography ... it contains endless repetitions, scores of irrelevancies and, because of other people involved, it ignores some of the most important phases of Olive's life. However, limited as it is in some ways, and garrulous in others, it is a most thorough piece of work (Ellis's influence can be felt throughout) and a gold-mine as far as significant material is concerned. (165)

Cronwright-Schreiner's sole authorial position becomes divided between two inexperienced biographers:

Cronwright did not know how to tackle the biography; neither did Ellis, for he was no biographer ... the misrepresentation that resulted one can only explain as a sad lack of understanding. (166)

The "misrepresentation" and "lack of understanding" directly undermines Cronwright-Schreiner's own claim to sole authority in the preface to his Life: "I had to face the inevitable fact that [Olive Schreiner] would be misunderstood and misrepresented, unless [I] should make an attempt to delineate her personality" (Life viii). Meintjes not only subverts the authority of the original biographer, but does so by appropriating the latter's own language, turning Cronwright-Schreiner's discourse back on itself. Meintjes's attack is thus aimed at the very source of Cronwright-Schreiner's claim to authority (the exposition of his authorial role in the preface), and acts, by implication, to secure Meintjes's own authorial position. This action constitutes Bloom's ratio of *askesis*, the "contest proper, the match-to-the-death with the dead" (Bloom 122). In *askesis* (a movement of self-purgation), the later poet,

... yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, and he does this in his poem by so stationing it in regard to the parent-poem as to make that poem undergo an *askesis* too; the precursor's endowment is also truncated. (Bloom15)

The appropriation of Cronwright-Schreiner's own terminology subverts Meintjes's claim to originality, but at the same time it serves to place the Life in relation to his own biography. Implicitly Meintjes constructs his own biography as discrete from Cronwright-Schreiner's.

Although Cronwright-Schreiner's Life fails, according to Meintjes (165), it contains the fruits of much laborious research. Having spent nineteen years researching his biography,⁷ Meintjes privileges Cronwright-Schreiner's own "research" as a great asset to later biographers. Yet at the same time he qualifies Cronwright-Schreiner's biography with the ambiguous adjective "laborious," implying that it is also "(be)laboured." This inference is reinforced by the terms "garrulous" and "exhaustive," the latter in turn connoting "exhausting." The estimation of Cronwright-Schreiner's biography as a "gold-mine as far as significant material is concerned" is undermined by Meintjes's reference to Cronwright-Schreiner's use of "insignificant material," and his claim that the Life contains "endless repetitions, scores of irrelevancies" (165).

Cronwright-Schreiner's claim to authority through personal knowledge of his subject is directly attacked by Meintjes:

The Birmingham Post described [the Life] as follows: 'We have seldom met with a biography in which the living interest is from first to last so powerful.' Considering the limitations of a biography by any husband of his wife, this is a fair opinion. (165)

Cronwright-Schreiner's claim to authority, based on his self-definition as "the only person who can be said to have known her, the only person who ever had adequate opportunity of knowing her fully" (Life ix) is thus redefined by Meintjes as a limitation rather than as a source of the truth. While using passages and sources from Cronwright-Schreiner's biography in order to authenticate his own narrative, Meintjes at the same time destroys Cronwright-Schreiner's authorial position, judging the earlier biography in terms of his own perception of the truth, which he defines as objective.

VIII

Assuming an authorial position superior to that of Cronwright-Schreiner, Meintjes claims:

It is also amazing how much one reads between the lines about Cronwright himself: a straightforward, intelligent man with his weaknesses ... there is disappointment, bewilderment and some self-justification, none of which surprises one. (165)

Meintjes exposes Cronwright-Schreiner as a victim, sympathizing with him in opposition to the threat which Olive Schreiner represents:

In marrying a famous woman, a woman hysterically adored by many in her own lifetime, Cronwright faced the unusual difficulties which all men in similar situations have to endure. There were those and still are, who thought that he merely married her for her fame and that he wished to use her as a step-ladder to further his own ends. One wonders what these ambitions could have been. (126)

The unanswered question with regard to Cronwright-Schreiner's ambitions suggests Meintjes's concurrence with his contemporaries who still believe that "he merely married her for her fame and ... wished to use her as a step-ladder." Yet while Cronwright-Schreiner is forced to contend with censorious critics, he faces a more immediate danger. His famous wife cannot be trusted to be loyal and submissive, for her subversive nature is constantly admired by those who gave her excessive approval (they "hysterically adored" her). Further, she offers her husband little in return for the "difficulties" she caused him. By declaring wonderment at Cronwright-Schreiner's ambitions, Meintjes implies that whatever they may have been, they remained unsatisfied. The negative reception of Cronwright-Schreiner's biography ("what is perplexing is the wave of hatred

which broke over his head" after its publication [126]) and Meintjes's own critique of it confirm Cronwright-Schreiner's failure to realize his aspirations and author his wife:

Prejudice against Cronwright became so general [after publication of his Life] that even modern biographers joined the anti-Cronwright league, shutting their eyes ... to the fact that he literally sacrificed the best part of his manhood and the major part of his life to Olive Schreiner.... It would suffice to say that, apart from all he was to endure as the result of the complexities of his wife's nature, Cronwright's life as such came temporarily to an end on the day of his marriage. (126)

As in Cronwright-Schreiner's Life, death becomes a metaphor for (temporary) impotence. This metaphor becomes the crucial link between Meintjes's construction of Cronwright-Schreiner and Cronwright-Schreiner's own presentation of himself. Here Meintjes fulfils Bloom's ratio of *apophrades* :

... the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work. (Bloom 16)

While the link between impotence and death is only implied through the discourse in Cronwright-Schreiner's Life, and represents a dialogue between him and an assumed interlocutor (the judgemental reader), Meintjes is at liberty to display openly the connection from the point of view of a later, and therefore better informed omniscient narratorial position. In so doing he gives the impression that Cronwright-Schreiner had constructed his subject-position under the influence of Meintjes's direct statement.

IX

Meintjes expresses pity for his male character whom he defines as a victim of his female other, and by implication of all women: "what is perplexing is the wave of hatred which broke over his head, an animosity which came almost exclusively from women" (126). Meintjes goes so far as to defend Cronwright-Schreiner against an attack by a female biographer, Vera Buchanan-Gould. According to Meintjes, Buchanan-Gould accuses Olive Schreiner's husband of having failed her ("of course the suggestion [in Buchanan Gould's biography] is that Cronwright was the one who failed" [164]). In response to his own claim Meintjes writes, "It is mystifying how a biographer could arrive at such a conclusion.... It is nearer the truth that Olive had failed Cronwright, and of course he was disappointed, not so much in her as a person, but as an artist" (164-5).

While Cronwright-Schreiner's disappointment was justified, according to Meintjes, it was also detrimental to his self-esteem:

As he had not failed her in any way and had done everything in his power to make her working conditions favourable, he became exasperated and embittered with her inability [to write] which he could not or would not recognise as such.... This was not an easy time for him, and certainly not for her; she had married an average male, no saint. (137)

Cronwright-Schreiner's mental decline becomes apparent in a comparison of his later state as "average" male with his character which is initially defined as exceptional (115). When they had first met "Olive knew without doubt that she was dealing with a person as she was never likely to meet again, somebody made by the same country and the same solitude as she had been" (116). Meintjes himself claims to be a product of the same environment, indeed he bases his authority as biographer on the assertion that "The strangeness, the beauty and the loneliness of the area ... has been part of my life as it was of hers" (preface). However,

Meintjes remains fixed within his superior authorial position, while Cronwright-Schreiner's decline is accelerated in correlation to the mounting number of sacrifices he is seen to have made.

With regard to Olive Schreiner's request that "Cronwright" change his name to Cronwright-Schreiner after their marriage, Meintjes writes: "This was the first of many sacrifices he was to make for her, and one that was not without its humiliating aspect. At a political meeting, some time later, a heckler shouted to Cronwright to speak under his maiden name" (122). Cronwright-Schreiner's second sacrifice consisted in giving up his farm for the sake of his wife's health: "One can feel him choke as he tells how he gave up this place which he had built up with his bare hands, his animals, his loyal workmen" (127).

Towards the end of his biography, Meintjes defines Cronwright-Schreiner as a broken man who "had worked extremely hard [during Olive's long absence], but the monotony of his work and his solitude had become unbearable. His health left much to be desired, and ... he knew that he had to make a break or suffer a nervous breakdown" (181). In justification of Cronwright-Schreiner's refusal to return to South Africa with his wife shortly before her death, Meintjes claims "it is understandable why he did not":

After slaving at his work for years, and in solitude after Olive had left him, Cronwright could hardly be expected to abandon his holiday in Europe just because Olive suddenly made up her mind to leave.... In fact, Cronwright watched her departure in a miserable state of mind. (182)

His health, youth and virility failing, Cronwright-Schreiner is unable to persuade his wife to stay in England with him. Incapable of controlling/authoring his wife, he becomes defined as an impotent man/biographer. While his wife escapes yet again, Cronwright-Schreiner realizes his impotence through his "miserable state of mind."

X

Concluding his biography, Meintjes quotes from Cronwright-Schreiner's description of Buffels Kop. The extract describes the couple's visit to that place in the early days of their relationship. At this point in both Cronwright-Schreiner's and Meintjes's biography, Cronwright-Schreiner is portrayed as a virile and intact male. It was during this visit to Buffels Kop that Olive Schreiner had chosen it as her burial site. Meintjes proceeds by paraphrasing Cronwright-Schreiner's account of Olive Schreiner's re-interment ("Appendix F. The Re-interment on Buffels Kop" [Life 394-401]). However, Meintjes insists on concluding his biography by presenting his own description of the surrounding landscape:

On that high stony koppie, Olive Schreiner now lies, surrounded by the great Karoo she had loved--the Karoo with its silence which had taught her so much, and its loneliness which had claimed her since birth. Nearby, at Cradock, is the Library where one can look at her books, at personal articles, photographs and manuscripts--the focal point of her life.

We leave her in the peace and solitude for which she had craved all her life, in the hope that her beautiful spirit will linger for ever, and that her message of love, tolerance and justice will become as strong as the sun that blazes over her lonely grave. (184)

Preceding this description, Meintjes reproduces the words on the brass plate attached to the sarcophagus ("OLIVE SCHREINER CRONWRIGHT-SCHREINER BABY AND 'NITA'"), implying that by the time he wrote his biography, all four must have been interred at Buffels Kop. Although no mention is made in any biography of Cronwright-Schreiner's interment or indeed of his death, the baby and 'Nita' were interred at the same time as Olive Schreiner. Yet Meintjes emphasizes Olive Schreiner's solitude and loneliness, reanimating her in isolation after her death ("her beautiful spirit will linger" in "peace and solitude"). In his concluding analysis

Meintjes defines Olive Schreiner as finally, contentedly, and quasi-voluntarily fulfilling the female role of passivity and lack. Cronwright-Schreiner, by contrast, simply ceases to exist beyond the parameters of his wife's death and Meintjes's biography. The process of his emasculation is completed. Silenced by Meintjes, the character "Cronwright" is literally forced to take up the symbolic female position of lack, silence and passivity, while his wife inhabits the subordinate but nevertheless endowed sign "solitude and isolation," represented by the sarcophagus. This image implies that Cronwright-Schreiner's self-conception was so inextricably united with his wife's that after her death it also ceased to exist. In defining him as existentially dependent on his wife Meintjes reasserts his own authority as individual and independent source of his subject's true life.

Samuel Cron Cronwright-Schreiner defined himself in his biography as other in opposition to his wife. Johannes Meintjes, not having known his subject personally, and writing and researching her life after her death, constructs himself in opposition to the original biographer, Cronwright-Schreiner. In so doing he fulfils the revisionary ratios posited by Harold Bloom in order to present himself as a strong poet in contrast to his impotent and dead precursor. The dialectical interdependence of the precursor and the "ephebe" poet is inadvertently exposed by Meintjes's narrative. Cronwright-Schreiner's attempt to author Olive Schreiner (as his wife and his biographical subject) becomes analogous to Meintjes's endeavour to assert his independence from the earlier biographer. This process involves the acknowledgement of Cronwright-Schreiner's biography which is subsequently exposed as inferior to the more modern text.

However, Meintjes's anxiety of castration becomes evident in the solidarity he displays towards Cronwright-Schreiner when both males are confronted with a woman who defies authorial control, and in the ambivalent stance he takes with regard to Cronwright-Schreiner's generally privileged biography. In an

attempt to appropriate a dominant position, Meintjes therefore presents Cronwright-Schreiner and his text as emasculated, that is, as equivalent to the female void.

Notes

¹ Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1984) 182-3.

² Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 58. Here Moi is discussing the views of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

³ See Ruth First and Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner (London: Deutsch, 1980) 294.

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (London: Picador, 1988) 102.

⁵ Donna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" in The Female Autograph (Chicago and London: U of Chicago Press, 1987) 4.

⁶ Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 78. For a detailed description of Bloom's theory see Chapter One, note 27.

⁷ On the dust wrapper to the 1965 edition of Meintjes's biography is stated: "Various biographers have found [Olive Schreiner] an irresistible subject, but thus far with more enthusiasm than insight. After studying her over a period of nineteen years, Johannes Meintjes has now given us a biography which is the most definitive yet written."

CHAPTER FOUR

Johannes Székely: Life and Work

I

Johannes Székely's Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow. Leben und Werk is not a biography in the conventional sense. It defies Paul Murray Kendall's definition of biography as "the simulation, in words, of a person's life, from all that is known about that person."¹ It neither makes the subject "live in a living world," a condition of biography proposed by Mark Schorer,² nor does it "narrate a life story,"³ or reconstruct, simulate, dramatize, or create an illusion of Franziska zu Reventlow's life.⁴ Nevertheless by entitling his work Leben und Werk, Székely presents himself as a life-writer. Also, his work displays the more recently defined characteristics of biography as presented by Ira B. Nadel: "biography becomes an enlarged trope of resemblance which provides a structure and method to identify the character of the subject while simultaneously projecting the assumptions of the biographer."⁵ Required by his own title to discuss his subject's life, Székely proposes a structure and model in order to "identify the character of the subject" through her writing while at the same time his model inadvertently projects his own point of view.

Székely's biography is presented in the form of an academic dissertation, meticulously annotated and indexed, and containing an extensive bibliography (259-320). Frequent references to secondary texts by contemporary critics (especially by Jost Hermand, Wolfdietrich Rasch and Helmut Kreuzer) serve to substantiate Székely's literary analysis, and to align his work to their expositions. Taking their work as exemplary and definitive, Székely gives priority to an analysis of Reventlow's work over a discussion of her life which, he implies, will become evident in his analysis of her literary texts.

In the opening sentence of his preface Székely claims:

Da fast alle Werke der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow (1871-1918) autobiographischen Charakter haben oder autobiographische Elemente enthalten, stellt die vorliegende Untersuchung ihrer vier wichtigsten Romane und der Tagebücher den Aspekt der Selbstdarstellung und -deutung in den Vordergrund. (XV)

The categorization of Reventlow's writing as autobiographical connotes its inferiority to male writing. Traditionally, writes Domna Stanton,

... 'autobiographical' constituted a positive term when applied to Augustine and Montaigne, Rousseau and Goethe, Henry Adams and Henry Miller, but ... it had negative connotations when imposed on women's texts. It had been used ... to affirm that women could not transcend, but only record, the concerns of the private self; thus, it had effectively served to devalue their writing.⁶

Székely selects only those works for discussion which refer to events he can verify through his subject's other texts. Her short stories, which cannot be obviously linked to her life (because they describe places she didn't visit, or contain characters she doesn't refer to elsewhere), are mentioned only three times in passing (45, 76, 183). Her unfinished novel Der Selbstmordverein, published posthumously, is referred to only once (76).

Székely defines Reventlow's first novel, Ellen Olestjerne, as an exceptionally accurate (because "rückhaltlos") autobiographical account of her childhood and early adulthood. In so defining it he presumes from the outset that he is able to separate the autobiographical characteristics and elements in the novel from the (merely) fictional ones:

In keinem ihrer Werke ... hat Franziska zu Reventlow sich mit so rückhaltloser Offenheit selbst dargestellt wie in Ellen Olestjerne. Dabei ist sie zunächst bemüht, den autobiographischen Gehalt des Romans zu verschleiern, durch den Einsatz fikionalisierender Mittel ('erlebte Rede', 'wörtliche Rede', Situationsbeschreibungen u.ä.) etwa, durch eine teilweise Verschlüsselung von Orten und Personen, besonders aber durch den vorherrschenden Gebrauch der Er-Form, der Fiktionsform von Romanen. (28-9)

The truth, according to this model, consists of fact plus fictional devices ("erlebte Rede, wörtliche Rede, Situationsbeschreibungen u.ä."). Further, the use of the "Er-Form" (or in this case a more correct term would be "Sie-Form") in Ellen Olestjerne is seen as divergent from the form of "pure" autobiography which conventionally adopts a first person narrator ("Ich-Erzähler"):

Die Setzung der Fiktion bedeutet in diesem Fall, wo es sich offensichtlich um einen 'autobiographischen' Roman handelt, eine Mißachtung der logisch-strukturellen Gesetzmäßigkeit, die den autobiographischen oder Memoirenroman als Form einer mehr oder weniger 'fingierten Wirklichkeitsaussage' eines Ich-Erzählers kennzeichnet. Sie läßt sich nur so erklären, daß die Autorin dem Selbsterlebten den Charakter des Erdichteten, Erfundenen verleihen möchte. (29)

In keeping with patriarchal views regarding women's writing Reventlow appears incapable of creating an original fictional text. She is presented as recording her own (historical) experiences, which she (somewhat deviously, and in spite of her efforts, transparently) presents in the form of a novel. Consequently, her texts are neither "pure" autobiographies nor "pure" novels, but a combination of both. The term "autobiographical novel" comes to signify a genre which is impure and therefore inferior to both history and fiction.

Székely presents his subject's texts as mirrors of her life, and her life as the unadulterated content of her novels: "das Leben selbst wird zur Literatur und die Literatur ist ein Spiegel dieses Lebens" (33). This notion, an expression of the humanist world-view, presumes that the subject's essential self existed prior to her writing. Székely's use of this metaphor confines his subject's self within his own fixed, self-referential structure. Reventlow ceases to exist as the autonomous author of her texts: "Zudem ist eine 'vollkommene Parteinahme' der Autorin für ihre Hauptfigur unverkennbar, die den Eindruck einer Selbstbespiegelung und Selbstoffenbarung verstärkt" (30). When he further argues "Diese auffällige Besspiegelung des eigenen Ich entspricht einem ... Bedürfnis nach Selbstdeutung" (31), he inadvertently undermines his own earlier statement. "Selbstdeutung" implies the ability of the author to exist independently outside her narrative, transcending it in order to observe and interpret the self presented within it. Yet his subject is unable to do this because, according to Székely, the character she produces in the autobiographical narrative *constitutes* her self. With the earlier statement Székely attempts to validate his mirror metaphor but, in order to do this, he applies his own structure to the subject's text in advance (die Parteinahme ist unverkennbar [30]).

The title of Johannes Székely's biography, Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow. Leben und Werk, illustrates his method of interpretation. By defining the subject (gr. *autos* , "self"), her life (gr. *bios*) and her writing (gr. *graphein*) at the outset as objects of his biography, Székely positions himself in the role of authoring subject. In order to maintain his dominant position throughout the text, he undermines Franziska zu Reventlow's own role as author by blending the categories he initially distinguishes as discrete. Defining autobiography as a mirror of life, Székely constructs a circular, closed method of interpretation, rendering his subject a mere character within her fiction.

II

The definition of the autobiographical novel as the sum of fact-plus-fiction reflects a conventional, realist world-view. In realism, the autobiographer (or autobiographical novelist) is believed to perceive an event which she then reproduces in her writing. Her experiences are transmitted to the reader, in this case Székely, directly through the text. In order to verify the authenticity of Reventlow's writing, Székely proceeds to compare her texts in the manner of Park Honan's theory of "parameters,"⁷ which sees the truth as recognizable through a comparison of common themes and images pervading the subject's texts. Székely's method of comparison becomes evident in these footnotes referring to quotations which he uses to support a single argument:

- 207 An Klages, 1.4.1902 (Br S. 384).
 - 208 Tb S. 42 (Neujahrsnacht 1896/97).
 - 209 Ebd. S. 36 (16.6.1895).
 - 210 Vgl. Schröder: Klages. T. 1. ... S. 310-317.
 - 211 EO (GW) S. 616.
 - 212 Tb. S. 42 (Neujahrsnacht 1896/7).
 - 213 EO (GW) S. 632.
 - 214 Ebd. S. 666 f.
 - 215 Tb. S. 53 (28.4.1897).
 - 216 Ebd. S. 118 (19.9.1899); An Klages, 2.9.1901 (Br. S. 335).
 - 217 An denselben, 31.8.1901 (Br. S. 333)
- [EO = Ellen Olestjerne; Tb = Tagebuch; GW = Gesammelte Werke; Br = Brief]. (38)

As a realist author and biographer, Székely need only familiarize himself with the true, factual events in his subject's life in order to understand her texts:

Angesichts eines außergewöhnlichen, abenteuerlichen Lebenslaufs, auf dessen Fakten die Werke aufbauen, stellt sich die Frage nach der Wechselbeziehung zwischen Leben und Literatur. Die Verschränkung von

biographischer und literarischer Ebene verlangt nach einer literaturwissenschaftlich-hermeneutischen Deutung, die ... Persönlichkeit und Leben der Autorin aus der Einzelinterpretation der Romane zu erhellen sucht, zugleich aber in den Lebenszeugnissen nach Aufschlüssen zum Verständnis des literarischen Werks forscht. (XV)

While Székely presents the autobiographical novel as a single closed entity, it nevertheless comprises the two discrete entities "life" and "writing." The critic/biographer is believed to hold the key to true meaning, which he is able to reveal by applying a method of interpretation which itself duplicates the interaction between the "writing" and the "life" (eine literaturwissenschaftlich-hermeneutische Deutung).⁸ By applying this methodology Székely believes he can separate the factual from the fictional. This position gives him complete authorial control over the life and the work of his subject. Thus he claims with regard to Ellen Olestjerne:

Der ... Erstling hat allerdings den Charakter eines Lebensdokuments von autobiographischer Zuverlässigkeit. Seine teilweise Fiktionalität jedoch, die Einführung erfundener Figuren mit symbolischem Verweisungswert und eines fiktiven Erzählers etwa, deuten schon auf eine über das rein Autobiographische hinausreichende Intention. (1-2)

In order to affirm his role as source and arbiter of meaning, Székely must insist on the factual reliability of Reventlow's novels ("autobiographische Zuverlässigkeit"). Having declared his subject's texts as autobiographical at the outset of his biography, Székely is at liberty to avoid a detailed analysis of her individual texts, resorting to a method of comparison in order to locate the truth ("Die stilistische und strukturelle Analyse muß dabei notwendigerweise zurücktreten" [XV]). Yet his method is circular and self-referential, for in order to separate fact from fiction Székely presumes in advance that her texts call for a particular

self-reflexive method of analysis. The subject becomes fixed within this interpretative model and within her own texts, ceasing to exist outside them. She becomes a fictional character, the product rather than the producer of her novels, while Székely appropriates the role of author of her "real" self by defining her texts as autobiographical.

III

The claim that her texts are autobiographical produces the equation "Ellen Olestjerne = Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow" (8n30). In the context of his earlier description of Ellen Olestjerne as "fiktiver Erzähler" (2), the identification of Ellen Olestjerne with Reventlow reduces the latter to a third person narrator within a fiction. This statement allows Székely to interpret Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow/Ellen Olestjerne as a literary construct, which he defines as "impressionistisch":

Ausdrücklich zu betonen ist, daß in Ellen Olestjerne lediglich das Lebensgefühl der Heldin von impressionistischen Tendenzen berührt ist, während der Roman von stilistischen Einflüssen des Impressionismus frei bleibt. (32n172)

Not the novel, but its main character, who is also Reventlow, becomes the expression of impressionistic tendencies. Reventlow and Ellen Olestjerne become equally valid representatives of Bohemia:

Grundsätzlich machen die Kreuzerschen Bohème-Definitionen deutlich, daß es sich bei der Romanheldin Ellen, wie bei der Reventlow selbst, um eine typische Vertreterin der literarischen Bohème der Jahrhundertwende handelt. (57)

Reventlow's enjoyment of travel (as a result of her constant search for new stimuli) becomes the manifestation of impressionistic tendencies:

Jost Hermand charakterisiert die Sucht nach dem Wechsel der Reize, der Vielfalt der Orte, auch als 'impressionistische Reiselust'.... Auch eine 'impressionistische' Vorliebe für das Veränderliche, Ungebundene, die Vielfalt der Orte steht [hinter dem häufigen Wohnungswechsel]. (239, 241)

Székely's method of defining Reventlow as a character in her novels culminates in the statement:

Die in Ellen Olestjerne beschriebene Erziehung der Lieblosigkeit ist nicht ohne Einfluß auf die spätere Lebenseinstellung der Reventlow geblieben. (53)

The sentence structure adopted by Székely avoids direct reference to the author of Ellen Olestjerne ("die [von Franziska zu Reventlow] beschriebene Erziehung"), thus concealing the fact that Reventlow authored the novel at the age of thirty-two. Yet Ellen Olestjerne constitutes the construction of a subject-position by Reventlow in her present act of writing, for it was written in retrospect from the point of view of the author who already knew the outcome of her narrative. Paradoxically, in Székely's presentation, the pattern Reventlow applies to her novel written in adulthood (the "Erziehung der Lieblosigkeit" as cause of later events), appears to have influenced Reventlow during her childhood.

Székely orders Reventlow's novels chronologically according to the periods of her life they deal with rather than their dates of publication (XV). As her novels are autobiographical the implication is that this sequence will assist the reader's act of deducing her life from Székely's analytical text. This method presumes that Reventlow is a unified, fixed entity, which survives through time and through the fictionalizing process as a discrete and finite subject, able to be reconstructed through her texts by any reader at any time. According to this view, it is irrelevant whether the subject writing about her childhood experiences is fourteen, twenty-four or forty years of

age at the time of writing. A discussion of the subject presented in Ellen Olestjerne would inevitably reveal the same essential subject as Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen (the novel which deals with her life from 1899-1904), and Von Paul zu Pedro and Der Geldkomplex which deal with her life from 1905-1916 (XV).

By defining Reventlow as a fixed and constant subject revealed through her texts (the essential child is also the essential adult), Székely avoids discussion of the adult author's subject-position(s) presented in Ellen Olestjerne. As shown, his construction of Reventlow as a fictional character reverses the chronological realist order of autobiographical writing. Székely presents the novel as preceding his subject's life, for he suggests that her youth was defined by the contents of Ellen Olestjerne, which, however, was written from an adult perspective (53).

Székely's identification of Reventlow with the characters in her novels fails, however, when at the same time he tries construct her as a fixed and unified subject:

Wie ihre Romanheldin findet auch die Gräfin Reventlow in dieser Periode der Kunstschwärmerei zur Malerei, die sie jahrelang für ihre eigentliche Begabung hält. (13)

Again Székely reverses the traditional order of experience, using the fictional character Ellen Olestjerne as a template for the subject Reventlow. More importantly, however, he is forced to construct two discrete identities--that of the character and that of the author--in order to validate his earlier claim that they are identical. Reventlow, previously equated with Ellen Olestjerne, is now compared to her in order to display their sameness.

IV

Székely presents Reventlow's writing as subjective:

Der entscheidende Charakterzug, welchen Franziska zu Reventlow auf ihre autobiographische Gestalt Ellen überträgt, ist ein absoluter Subjektivismus ... bei allem

Bemühen um chronikalische Objektivität bleibt die Verarbeitung subjektiver Erfahrungen in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen dominierendes Element der Darstellung. (31, 147-8)

Subjectivity is posited as the negative opposite to objectivity which, according to Székely, Reventlow had intended, but failed, to attain. Székely provides evidence of her subjective writing style in his discussion of her diaries, which are designated as the site for her confession and self-justification. The two main themes in the diaries are a "Wunsch nach Wahrheit" and a "Verlangen nach Selbstrechtfertigung," motives which Székely sees as contradictory:

Der in dieser Haltung begründete Widerspruch zum Wahrheitsverlangen ergibt sich für die Gräfin offenbar nicht, da sie nur eine 'pragmatische' Wahrheit anerkennt: wahr ist, was ihrer persönlichen Situation nützt. (227)

Reventlow's search for truth becomes a subjective pursuit, while Székely himself privileges objectivity as conducive to finding the "real" truth. By this definition Reventlow fails to achieve great literary status because the subjective act of creation is hindered by her own (essentially subjective) nature:

Der stärkste Antrieb zum Tagebuchs Schreiben liegt für die Gräfin im Bedürfnis nach Selbstbekenntnis und Selbstcharakterisierung. Doch gerade die seelische Offenbarung und die Formulierung des Selbst werden durch Hemmungen und Ausdrucksschwierigkeiten behindert. (215)

Székely further undermines his subject's work by frequently criticising the stylistic presentation of her texts, defining Ellen Olestjerne as a "stilistisch noch unbeholfene[r] Versuch" and Von Paul zu Pedro as her "graziös-ironischen, meist aber nur unterhaltsamen Briefgesprächen" (76). He further

qualifies the latter by claiming "Dabei kommt es vereinzelt zu stilistischen Entgleisungen, zum Abgleiten in den saloppen Umgangston" (157), and her diaries by stating "Die stilistischen Schwächen der Reventlow treten im Tagebuch natürlich noch deutlicher zutage als in den überarbeiteten Romanen" (251).

According to Székely, Reventlow's most successful novel is Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen, although her success is undermined by his preceding reference to Rasch: "Wie Rasch mit Recht feststellt, hat Franziska zu Reventlow jene erhoffte große literarische Leistung sicher nicht vollbracht. Dennoch gelang ihr mit dem Roman Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen ein deutlicher Höhepunkt ihrer literarischen Entwicklung" (76). As Székely deems this novel the least autobiographical, it supports his preference for objectivity:

Anders als die primär autobiographischen Werke Ellen Olestjerne, Von Paul zu Pedro und Der Geldkomplex dienen Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen erst in zweiter Linie der Selbstdarstellung, die sich hier allerdings durch eine für die Reventlow ungewöhnliche Mehrschichtigkeit auszeichnet. (124)

Although he had earlier defined her texts as accurate representations of the truth precisely because of their autobiographical elements, here the worth of Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen lies in its less subjective and therefore, by implication, more objective, truthful narration. Further, while Székely accuses his subject of recognizing only a "pragmatische Wahrheit" (227), his own verdict of Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen as her best novel is indicative of his own pragmatic approach, for it is this novel which enables him to discuss Bohemian Munich.

Székely claims that Herrn Dames Aufzeichnung marked "ein deutlicher Höhepunkt ihrer literarischen Entwicklung" for in it Reventlow achieved "eine[..] eigene[..] Handhabung der Ironie als Stilmittel" (76). As it constitutes a means of achieving objectivity,

by Székely's definition irony becomes a positive feature able to reveal the truth :

Die Ironie in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen wird vor allem erzielt durch eine vorgeschützte Naivität des fiktiven Autors Dame, in dessen Perspektive sich die Kosmiker-Bewegung erhaben und groß darstellt, während sie in Wirklichkeit gerade dadurch entlarvt und verspottet wird. (84)

However, Reventlow's use of irony is not seen as a "philosophisch-metaphysisches Prinzip" nor as the "Standpunkt oder Denkweise der Autorin" but merely as a "literarisches Stilphänomen" (85). Székely presents her work as an expression of subjective impulses and of general literary tendencies, so denying her the role of author.

V

In an attempt to affirm his own role as author Székely supports his analysis by comparing his subject's work with texts by reputable writers of fiction. Influenced by these men, Reventlow is never able to be original, a quality which Székely appears to privilege. References to Nietzsche abound and of Ibsen's influence Székely claims:

Überdeutlich tritt hier--wie in der Symboltechnik in Ellen Olestjerne überhaupt, was noch an weiteren Beispielen zu erläutern ist--der Einfluß Ibsens hervor, der in seinem Gespenstersymbol die Ohnmacht des Menschen gegen das Vererbungsgesetz, gegen eine bedrohliche 'Wiederkehr' der Vergangenheit, des Vaters im Sohn, ausdrückt und im Meer einen 'magisch-mythischen, dunklen Bereich', eine für den Menschen verderbenbringende Schicksalsmacht symbolisiert. (9)

This passage literally demonstrates Székely's method of elevating Ibsen's texts over and above those of his subject. What

commences as an analysis of Reventlow's use of symbolism quickly becomes overshadowed by a reference to Ibsen's Gespenster. Ibsen becomes the originator of the symbol, Reventlow merely its emulator. The reference to Ibsen's Gespenster reinforces Székely's earlier inclusion of a comparison of symbols in Ellen Olestjerne and Ibsen's Rosmersholm (8). In both instances the discussion of Ibsen's texts becomes longer and more pronounced than Székely's discussion of Reventlow's Schloß Nevershuus, the symbol in Ellen Olestjerne. The commentary on symbolism in Rosmersholm is supported by quotations from other critical analyses of Ibsen's texts ("Sayler: Die Entwicklung des Symbolismus in Henrik Ibsens Gesellschaftsstücken" and "Paul: Symbol und Mythos" [9n34-6]).

The evaluation of Schloß Neverhuus as a symbol is based on Székely's statement:

Franziska zu Reventlow, die in Ellen Olestjerne von einer symbolischen Ausdrucksweise nur sparsam Gebrauch macht (in ihren übrigen Romanen noch weniger) und dabei schwache oder falsche Symbole verwendet ... will hier, ähnlich wie in anderen Stellen des Romans, mit ihren fast immer Ibsen entlehnten Personen-, Raum- und Dingsymbolen auf die fatalistische Schicksalsgebundenheit ihrer Heldin verweisen. (8n31)

Despite the statement that she seldom uses symbols, Székely continues this footnote by outlining Goethe's theory of symbols. Székely's analysis becomes an application of Goethe's theory to Ibsen's text, while Ellen Olestjerne, and therefore Reventlow, become the aside.

Székely presents Reventlow as an imitator of significant texts which are paradigmatic of their era. Her fictional characters and she herself are presented as typical:

Grundsätzlich machen die Kreuzerschen Bohème-Definitionen deutlich, daß es sich bei der Romanheldin Ellen, wie bei der Reventlow selbst, um eine typische Vertreterin der literarischen Bohème der Jahrhundertwende handelt. (57)

Her choice of genre (the "Schlüsselroman" in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen and the sequence of "Hetärengespräche" in Von Paul zu Pedro) is a manifestation of common trends:

Der spöttische Angriff der Gräfin auf die Kosmiker ist typisch für diese Modellgruppe.... Zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts entstand eine neue Tendenz, das Leben der Hetären literarisch zu verarbeiten.... Für die Reventlow, die sich dieser literarischen Tendenz nicht verschloß, lag es nahe, autobiographische Elemente erotischen Inhalts mit Thematik und Form des klassischen Hetärengesprächs ... zu vermischen. (78, 170)

Her attitude to money, visible, according to Székely, in her novel Der Geldkomplex, is typically Bohemian (177). But Székely not only subverts her ability to be original, which by his definition is synonymous with creative, by constructing her and her texts as typical products of her time. He also insists that she is not even a good copyist. Another symbol she is said to have borrowed from Ibsen is the 'Gnom' in Ellen Olestjerne, which Székely claims is a reproduction of the gnome-like character in Peer Gynt:

Die Gestalt des Gnoms erinnert ... an den Krummen in Peer Gynt ... und scheint Ibsens naturmythischer Figurenwelt der Hexen und Trolle entlehnt zu sein, ohne deren 'bewußt ideelle Bedeutung' ... zu besitzen.... Eine solche Gläubigkeit an die 'Wirklichkeit' des Mythos wird an Ellen während des Erscheinens des Gnoms zwar ansatzweise spürbar, wengleich die Nachahmung Ibsens hier kaum gelingt. (22-3)

According to Székely, Reventlow fails as a writer of fiction by producing autobiographical texts. By incorporating inferior imitations of other writers' work into these texts, she becomes an inferior copyist. Székely reaches this conclusion by assuming that his subject had intended to emulate Ibsen's works. By using Ibsen as a template for Reventlow's writing, he is able to prove that her novels are ineffective and inadequate.

VI

Throughout the biography Reventlow is presented as emotive, impulsive and representative rather than as intellectual, rational and unique. Her uninhibited life of pleasure is not so much due to a "programmatische Lebensanschauung" as to an inherent "libertine Veranlagung" (36). She follows no political agenda and her criticism of society is founded on personal interests alone:

Daß diese Gesellschaftskritik allein durch individuelle Bedürfnisse, nicht aber durch soziales Engagement motiviert ist, zeigt schon Ellens politische Abstinenz. (46)

Although she lived an unconventional life, she lacked the motivation to join the women's movement (49). When she did appropriate a particular opinion Székely suspects she did so involuntarily: "Damit folgt sie--vielleicht ungewollt--einem neuen Kult der Männlichkeit" (50). She is defined as expressing an apathetic and depressive passivity in her diaries ("Der nicht seltene Zustand des apathisch-depressiven Halbbewußtseins ist im Tagebuch eindrucksvoll dokumentiert" [221]).

In a footnote Székely claims that she herself regretted a lack of intellectual ability:

Die Reventlow bedauerte damals gegenüber Stern, nicht intellektueller zu sein; sie tue sich etwas schwer, weil ihr 'immer im Moment alle möglichen Kenntnisse fehlten.' (129n375)

By redefining her own self-proclaimed lack of specific knowledge as an intellectual short-coming, Székely presents her as essentially inferior and as cognizant of her own inferiority.

In contrast to Székely's presentation of Reventlow, her male contemporaries are defined throughout the biography as objective, intellectual and rational. Frequent references to the influence of great ("bedeutende") men on her life and work culminate in the somewhat ambiguous statement that Reventlow had a "spirituelle Ausstrahlung, mit der sie geistig bedeutende Männer anzog und um sich versammelte" (151). The term "spirituell," implying an intuitive, passive and involuntary characteristic, stands in juxtaposition to the concrete, deliberate and conscious rationale of the "geistig bedeutenden Männer."

In Székely's text, female characteristics appear as opposites to male attributes. By this definition, change, or at least a challenge to the prevailing ideologies, was brought about by men, while Reventlow was a mere recorder of their lives and theories. Thus, in an inappropriate comparison, Székely claims Socrates used irony as a pedagogical device, whereas Reventlow applied it for the purposes of "heitere[...] Entlarvung und Desillusionierung" (85). While Nietzsche anticipated the Jugendstil movement in his Zarathustra (61) Reventlow is presented as a mere follower of Nietzsche along with many of her contemporaries ("Diese Wirkung ist auch im Werk der Franziska zu Reventlow spürbar, die zu den begeisterten Nietzsche-Anhängern der Jahrhundertwende zählt" [7]). The influence of Jugendstil on Franziska zu Reventlow's Ellen Olestjerne is attributed to Ludwig Klages, the "Philosoph[...] des Jugendstils" who advised and encouraged her while she was writing the novel (61).

Reventlow is presented not as an independent and autonomous subject, but as a representative of her generation and contemporary society:

Die Lebensgeschichte der jungen Komteß Reventlow ist nicht nur repräsentativ für die Stimmungslage ihrer Generation in den achtziger und frühen neunziger Jahren, sondern überdies seltenes Beispiel einer kompromißlosen Realisation von Lebensverständnis und Reformideen dieser Zeit. (18)

As sole author of his subject's life and work Székely defines his task as that of reading from the particular (Reventlow's life and work) the general aspects of the literary environment of fin de siècle Germany. In so doing he duplicates the very world-view he is attempting to analyse. As reproducer of the literary and theoretical conventions of her era, which, according to Székely, saw the particular as a manifestation of the general and universal in the Romantics' sense,⁹ Reventlow becomes a symbol of her time.

VII

As we have seen, in order to present himself as a scholar, Székely must construct his biography in an objective, scientific manner, in opposition to Reventlow's subjectivity. The role of scholar he aspires to forces him to anchor his procedure and his conclusions outside his closed system of interpretation in keeping with traditional literary critical methods. As a result, his biography frequently contains lists of authors whom Székely uses to authenticate particular characteristics of Reventlow's texts. These lists often remain suspended between two paragraphs of his analysis:

In der Tat ist die Literatur dieser Zeit ungewöhnlich stark bestimmt durch ein übertriebenes Selbstgefühl, das besonders bei Nietzsche hervortritt, durch dessen Werk etwa ein 'ewig wiederholtes, großgeschriebenes Ich, Ich, Ich' hindurchgeht.

Typisch für diesen Ich-Kult sind neben Stirners schon 1845 erschienenem Hauptwerk Der Einzige und sein Eigentum, der 'Bibel der Ich-gläubigen', Romane wie Die Geschichte der jungen Renate Fuchs (1900) von Jakob Wassermann, Kreuzigungen (1904) von Emil Strauss und vor allem Heinrich Steinitzers Tragödie des Ich (1912) mit seiner pathetischen Ich-Thematik, die das Ich als allgegenwärtig 'schreiende' Lebensaufgabe beschreibt.

Solche fast ausschließlich literarisch geübte Ich-Verherrlichung unterscheidet sich allerdings deutlich von dem in den Büchern der Reventlow demonstrierten Subjektivismus, der immer auch im Leben praktiziert worden ist. (33)

Apart from analysing her texts by referring to other, similar texts, Székely declares not only that Reventlow had written her life into her novels, but that she had led her life according to prevailing fictional concepts. In Székely's analysis, the determining feature "subjectivity" is presented as a typical element of fin de siècle fictional writing. However, his subject, defined by this literary phenomenon, also differs from contemporary writers of fiction in that she actually lived the fiction. By constructing the essential Reventlow through a comparison with fictional characters, Székely must concede that, due to the very fact that she lived a fiction she defies definitive categorization. Nevertheless, he consistently attempts to fix her in the static terminology of literary genres, which generates the most contrived summary:

Zusammenfassend läßt sich sagen, daß Ellen Olestjerne zu den von der impressionistischen 'nordischen' Literatur geprägten 'Frauenromanen' der Jahrhundertwende zählt, in denen die

Emanzipationsthematik hinter der Betonung seelischer Momente und des Individuellen zurücktritt, während eine frauenrechtlerische Tendenz fehlt. (64)

There appears to be no single, fixed term which will suffice to categorize his subject. While Reventlow's novel is defined as similar to Scandinavian women's novels, which Székely claims conceal their emancipatory theme, the deciding element (the theme which is present in spite of its concealment) is absent in her text. Székely obscures the contradiction in his argument by re-phrasing "Emanzipation" as "frauenrechtlerische Tendenz."

Despite his attempts to categorize Reventlow, Székely is forced to admit that in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen his subject defies an equation equivalent to that used in Ellen Olestjerne ("Ellen Olestjerne = Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow" [8]). According to Székely, elements of her personality and character are contained in several characters of Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen. With regard to Dame, the novel's main character, Székely states:

Keine Schlüsselfigur ist Dames Diener Chamotte.... Dies gilt auch für die Titelgestalt Dame, soweit sie nicht Züge von Franz Hessel und der Reventlow trägt. (81)

Székely explains Dame's split nature by referring to a similarity between the essential selves which are Reventlow and Franz Hessel:

... hinter dem melancholischen und fatalistischen Dame-Hessel ... [verbirgt sich] in Wirklichkeit die Gräfin selbst ... die so eine gewisse Wesensverwandtschaft zum traurig-zerbrechlichen Hessel dokumentiert, den sie zeitweilig recht gut leiden konnte. (125)

Székely claims also that "Dame Züge der Reventlow trägt und in Wirklichkeit ihr Autor-Ich vertritt" (82). Yet in his key to the "Schlüsselroman" Székely had already equated Reventlow with

the characters Susanna and Maria (80-1). He describes the relationship between the three characters Dame, Susanna, and Maria as a subject-object relationship:

Unterstrichen wird diese Verrätselung noch dadurch, daß der Ich-Erzähler Dame zu der als Schlüsselfigur selbst im Roman erscheinenden Autorin (Susanna, Maria) in einer Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung steht, d.h. die Reventlow erweckt den Eindruck, sie selbst sei nur Objekt der Beobachtungen und Schilderungen Dames. (82)

The dispersion of Reventlow's essential self over three characters in her novel, combines with the juxtaposition of the split object (Susanna/Maria) and the subject Dame to subvert Székely's construction of Reventlow as a unified, unambiguous subject. The diffused subject becomes a threat to the biographer who assumes a role of sole and unique author in opposition to his subject. Consequently Székely re-establishes his dominant position by stating: "[es] scheint ... der Autorin darauf anzukommen, den geringen Grad [der Fingiertheit des Tagebuchromans] auf eine ironisch gemeinte, für den Leser leicht durchschaubare Weise zu steigern" (82). The text becomes defined as the simple sum total of only slightly veiled meaning ("de[r] geringe[.] Grad seiner Fingiertheit") and ("leicht durchschaubare") irony.

Throughout the remaining discussion of Reventlow's novels Székely emphasizes the ironic aspect of her writing--the terms "ironisch-selbstironisch," "ironisch," "Ironie," and "Ironisierung" appear on almost every page and up to five times on one particular page (152). Székely defines Reventlow's use of irony in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen as "Die Spannung ... zwischen dem wörtlich von Dame Gesagten (und scheinbar naiv Geglaubten) und dem eigentlich von der Reventlow Gemeinten" which he claims creates "einen ironischen Spielraum, in dem die ironischen Anspielungen und Bezüge sich entfalten können" (85). Having placed this definition at the outset of his discussion of Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen and having based his analysis of

"irony" on other theoretical texts (84n64, 85n66), Székely consistently refers back to it, causing the suspicion that in so doing he is able to avoid a more detailed analysis of the novel's dynamic structure and method of characterization.

In his discussion of her diaries, Székely is forced to acknowledge that Reventlow constructs contradictory subject-positions. In one instance, he claims that she at once writes herself as "Melancholikerin" and as "Sanguinikerin" and adds:

Auch darin findet sich die bereits erwähnte Widersprüchlichkeit ihres Charakters bestätigt, der immer den Eindruck von Sprunghaftigkeit, Zweispältigkeit und Dissonanz vermittelt. (222)

Székely reconstructs his subject as fixed and straightforward by defining her individual characteristics as (simply) contradictory. Further, her diffused nature becomes merely a popular characteristic of fin de siècle literature:

Züge der Autorin sind zugleich in drei Romanfiguren zu erkennen: außer in der allgemein als Reventlow identifizierten Susanna in Maria und--teilweise--in der zentralen Erzählerfigur Dame. Diese Technik der Aufsplitterung ist in der Schlüsselliteratur, aber auch in der 'Modellliteratur' keineswegs ungewöhnlich. Sie wird bevorzugt bei der Selbstdarstellung der Verfasser. (124)

Székely is unable to reveal a fixed subject by analysing Reventlow's texts. In order to construct her as an undivided entity, he is forced to avoid detailed discussion of her characters by defining them as simple manifestations of irony, and as straightforward representations of her (albeit duplicitous) whole nature, which he presents as a typical manifestation of fin de siècle self-perception.

VIII

As the biography proceeds, the subject "Franziska zu Reventlow" becomes increasingly subordinated by Székely's endeavour to present himself as a literary scholar. In his discussion of Ellen Olestjerne he subverts the significance of the central character by giving priority to the theme of the novel over its third person narrator: "So steht zwar die Lebensgeschichte der Titelfigur im Mittelpunkt der Erzählhandlung, zum eigentlichen Thema des Romans wird jedoch das 'Leben' selbst, nach Rasch Grundwort und Grundwert der 'Dichtung um 1900', der Phase der deutschen Literatur zwischen 1890 und 1914" (2). "Leben" is further defined as the common denominator of fin de siècle literature (2).

Székely privileges Wolfdietrich Rasch's definition of "Leben" over that of other critics:

Rasch: Aspekte der deutschen Literatur um 1900.... (Die folgende Darstellung orientiert sich besonders an Raschs grundlegendem Aufsatz)... Anders als Rasch fixieren ihn z.B. Helmut Kreuzer (1870-1924), Jost Hermand (1885-1914) und Hans Schwerte (1888-1918). (2n6)

By juxtaposing divergent definitions of the "Literatur der Jahrhundertwende," Székely forces entry into "der von Wolfdietrich Rasch, Jost Hermand und Helmut Kreuzer entscheidend vorangetriebenen Diskussion um die Literatur der 'Jahrhundertwende'" (XV). The presentation of Reventlow's life and work subsequently becomes suppressed by a general discussion of fin de siècle literature, and as a result her novels are mentioned only in passing, as examples of the influence of other, more significant texts and ideas (in particular Nietzsche's):

Diese Gesinnung, von der auch Franziska zu Reventlow beeinflusst ist ... nennt Rasch 'Lebenspathos.' (2-3)

Der einzige Sinn des Daseins besteht im irdischen Leben, was dazu führt, daß man selbst vom Leben des einzelnen mit Emphase spricht, wie zum Beispiel auch Franziska zu Reventlow von ihrem eigenen Leben. (3-4)

Den nachhaltigsten Eindruck vermittelt die Lebensphilosophie mit ihrer ... Vision einer Erneuerung des Lebens, der vor allem aus Nietzsches Kulturkritik erwachsenen neuen Ethik, deren Wertvorstellungen sich deutlich im Roman der Reventlow widerspiegeln. (5)

Diese Wirkung ist auch im Werk der Franziska zu Reventlow spürbar, die zu den begeisterten Nietzsche-Anhängern der Jahrhundertwende zählt. (7)

The subject of the biography is excluded from the male dialogue. Being unable to enter into the interaction, she becomes object rather than subject of the biography. As a result, her name emerges as merely superimposed on the apparently more valuable discussion of literary and philosophical theories.

Székely's analysis discusses the content of her novels only insofar as it is representative of fin de siècle German writing in general, and conducive to the subject-position of literary scholar he assumes:

Die [Székelys] Untersuchung versteht sich als Beitrag zu der von Wolf Dietrich Rasch, Jost Hermand und Helmut Kreuzer entscheidend vorangetriebenen Diskussion um die Literatur der 'Jahrhundertwende'. Das bedeutet, daß die Romane der Reventlow nicht isoliert betrachtet werden, sondern im Zusammenhang mit den vielfältigen Stilbewegungen, thematischen und formalen Tendenzen, Begriffen und 'Ideen' der Zeit um 1900. (XV-XVI)

Székely endeavours to gain a position in academic literary society by comparing his subject's novels to the prevailing themes and

literary conventions of her time. Yet he abstains from directly classifying her work:

Nicht berührt werden kann in diesem Rahmen der trivilliterarische Aspekt ... sind die Romane der Reventlow (oder Elemente darin) Bestandteil einer 'höherstehenden Unterhaltungsliteratur' mit starker Tendenz zur 'Literatenliteratur' ... oder trivialisierte Abkömmlinge dieser Schicht, die sich einer 'höherstehenden Unterhaltungsliteratur' nähern? (XVI)

By alluding to trivial literature in the form of a hypothetical question, Székely seems to distance himself from this possible categorization of his subject's work. His unwillingness to form definitive evaluations of her texts demonstrates his fear of reaching conclusions which subsequently might contradict the opinions of his academic peers.

Székely follows this question with a discussion of the genre "trivial literature," the length and detail of which evokes the impression that he does indeed judge her writing as trivial. This leads to an apparent subordination of her texts to "high" fin de siècle literature and ideology, which in turn enables the biographer to use his subject's texts as an opening for the analysis of a more serious body of literature. Further, it serves to illustrate Székely's ability to recognize them as inferior, thus securing his place within a literary elite which privileges "high" literature. Yet conversely, in order to construct himself as a serious academic, Székely must also justify his choice of subject. He therefore defines the trivial aspect of her writing as a general manifestation of fin de siècle literature. Trivial literature becomes an "historisches Phänomen ... das durch die besonderen individuellen, gesellschaftlichen und politisch-ideologischen Voraussetzungen der Epoche um 1900 bestimmt ist" (XVII). Finally, both the process of negatively judging Reventlow's texts and the process of vindicating them leads Székely to a general discussion of fin de siècle literature.

Székely defines Reventlow's work as trivial, subjective, sentimental, representative (rather than exceptional) and founded on theories put forward by male philosophers and writers of her era. He further undermines his subject's authorial role by presenting her as a fictional character within her own writing. The combination of these two processes satisfies Székely's desire to dominate and author his female subject, and to support his anticipated claim to literary scholarship. Yet by subjecting Franziska zu Reventlow to a literary analysis through her texts, Székely propounds a model of interpretation which is circular and self-referential as well as philosophically and methodologically unsound.

Notes

- 1 Paul Murray Kendall, "Walking the Boundaries," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 39.
- 2 Mark Schorer, "The Burdens of Biography," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 87.
- 3 Stephen B. Oates, "Biography as High Adventure," in Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) x.
- 4 Paul Mariani, "Reassembling the Dust," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 119.
- 5 Ira B. Nadel, Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984) 166.

- ⁶ Donna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" in The Female Autograph (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1987) 4.
- ⁷ Park Honan, "Beyond Sartre, Vercors, and Bernard Crick: Theory and Form in Literary Biographies," New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation 16.3 (1985): 645-6. See Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of Honan's "parameters."
- ⁸ While a literary interpretation will reveal the truth concealed in the subject's fiction, a hermeneutical interpretation will illuminate the true, essential intentions of the writing subject. For a more detailed discussion of hermeneutics see Terry Eagleton, "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory," in Literary Theory. An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 54-90.
- ⁹ Székely writes: "die Dichtung um 1900 [entwirft] mit ihrem Lebensbegriff eine neue Ordnung, in der das reale Einzelne als Symbol des Universalen verstanden und das aus der Romantik weiterwirkende Gefühl der großen Einheit mit dem Alleben grundlegend wird" (2).

CHAPTER FIVE

Helmut Fritz: The Female Subject

I

The title of Helmut Fritz's biography, Die erotische Rebellion. Das Leben der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, immediately alerts the reader to its repeated emphasis on Franziska zu Reventlow's liberal attitude towards sexuality and the life she lived in accordance with it. In the text sexual liberation becomes the defining measure of a woman's emancipation, and by presenting his subject from this exclusive point of view, Fritz constructs her as exciting, exemplary and worthy of emulation by modern women. Yet at the same time, unable to elude the discourse of patriarchal ideology, the subject Fritz presents is produced by that very discourse which defines women as objects of the male gaze.

As has been discussed in Chapter Three, Kaja Silverman describes the action of the male gaze which causes the male to be defined in terms of his capacity to look and the female in terms of her capacity to attract the gaze.¹ Voyeurism, according to Silverman, is the "active or 'masculine' form of the scopophilic drive, while exhibitionism is the passive or 'feminine' form of the same drive." The female subject signifies the absence of the phallus and her body becomes the means for representing this deprivation. "She simultaneously attracts the gaze--appeals to the senses--and represents castration" which in turn evokes anxiety in her male observer (Silvermann 223).

In Silverman's analysis there are two ways in which the male can avert his fear of castration:

The first involves a demonstration that the woman's castrated condition is the result either of wrong-doing or of sickness.... The second solution to the anxiety aroused by the spectacle of female lack involves the

transformation of the female body into a fetish, substituting either one of its parts or the whole for the missing phallus. This privileged zone ... is subjected to an overvaluation.... The mechanisms of fetishism function to reassure the male subject that the woman to whom his identity is keyed lacks nothing, that she has not been castrated after all. (Silverman 224)

While Silverman is referring to the male subject in classic film texts, and by implication in narratives in general, Fritz, in writing Reventlow's biography, writes himself into the text, thus becoming a subject within it. Fritz's biography can therefore be read as an interaction of the two processes defined by Silverman.

Fritz's text belongs to the genre of popular biography, which is in part intended to satisfy the reader's scopophilic drive. Leon Edel denigrates such productions:

We need not concern ourselves with 'camp' biographies or daubs ... they belong to certain kinds of life histories written by journalists in our time ... they are more related to the photographic, the visual moment ... the great and flourishing field of interminable gossip disseminated by the media.²

Fritz's career as a journalist parallels his overtly visual presentation of Reventlow's life.³ His biography consists of short, cameo-like chapters, which are unnumbered, suggesting the possibility of a non-chronological reading. Indeed, each chapter can be read independently, presenting the illusion of a self-contained snapshot from Reventlow's life. This method of presentation as well as Fritz's use of colloquial language might be in response to Reventlow's own writings, especially to her diary in which she often omits verbs, uses idioms and keeps her records to a minimal length. Conversely, it may have been her seemingly spontaneous writing style which attracted Fritz in the first instance.

The format of Fritz's biography is reminiscent of a newspaper, designed to catch the reader's attention immediately. Each chapter title, in most cases a clause from his subject's own writing, is followed by a short quotation which influences the reader in favour of the particular point of view subsequently to be expounded. Further, Fritz's narrative is supported by photographs of Reventlow, her acquaintances and lovers as well as of houses in which she resided, facsimiles of documents, and a photograph of her grave. Fritz's text becomes an exhibit intended as the object of the reader's scopophilic drive, while the exhibitor himself represents the camera which "'looks' the viewer as subject." By appropriating this subject-position he takes on the qualities "which in fact belong to that same apparatus--qualities of potency and authority" (Silverman 223).

According to Silverman, the role of the viewing camera is "the only truly productive gaze in the cinema" (Silverman 223). In his biography, Fritz produces images with which his readers can identify, and which serve to coerce them. Further, by seizing the position of the powerful and authoritative camera, Fritz appropriates a subject-position in opposition to that of his "lacking" female protagonist. The female subject comes to signify the lack "which properly belongs both to the male and the female viewers, who are spoken, not speaking, and whose gazes are controlled, not controlling" (Silverman 223). The void created by the female protagonist and the readers/viewers must be filled in order to assuage the readers' and the biographer's fear of castration. Fritz does this by substituting for it Reventlow's body which consequently becomes overvalued. In this manner the authority remains with Fritz, who controls both the subject of his biography and the reader's gaze while at the same time he exorcizes his own castration anxiety.

II

Fritz's discourse is firmly based on a dualistic ideology which defines males as rational, creative, and guided by their minds, while women are deemed driven by their irrational,

undisciplined, and unconstrainable bodies. In keeping with this view Reventlow is presented as unable to create original art:

Als Malerin, Sängerin, Schauspielerin und Kunstgewerblerin hatte sie nicht viel Fortune, um so mehr Glück bei den Männern. Sie ließ kaum eine Gelegenheit für Liebe oder Sex ungenützt. (4)

By defining her as a passive opportunist, Fritz undermines Reventlow's ability to appropriate the position of the creative and active phallus. He further disallows her any decisive expression of her own sexuality, by declaring her the "lucky" target of active male attention. She becomes the passive object with regard to both art and sexuality, while by implication her male benefactors are construed as subjects of control, power and privilege. When Fritz eventually refers to her role as a writer, her authorial position is qualified much in the same way as in Székely's biography:

... indem sie aus diesem Leben auch noch Literatur machte, wurde sie zu einer der eindrucksvollsten Schriftstellerinnen der Jahrhundertwende. (4)

Again, Reventlow becomes a mere recorder of her life. This statement stands at the end of the introductory passage "Über dieses Buch," and displays the humanist notion that the subject's experience existed a priori to her writing. In Fritz's presentation the writing becomes merely an incidental addition to the preceding experience.

Székely's claim that Reventlow's writing was autobiographical and his use of the self-reflexive mirror-metaphor are reproduced in Fritz's statement:

Über die Liebe schrieb sie stets autobiographisch, in einem von ihr kreierten Stil, der frivol und zugleich von äußerster Diskretion ist.... Frivol ist allein die Art, wie sie über die Liebe denkt und darüber schreibt.... Sie braucht nichts zu erfinden, ihr Leben liefert den Stoff. (19, 80)

Yet unlike Székely, who equates the work with the life, Fritz places his emphasis on his subject's "love" experiences. By implication, life becomes equated with love which in turn signifies the sexual consummation of love.

Fritz's definition of Reventlow's writing is paradigmatic of the patriarchal view of female writing as generally inferior to male texts. Fritz deems it subjective (autobiographical) and regards it as fulfilling the demands of a male dominated society, because it presents the traditionally female topic "love" in a frivolous yet discreet manner. This analysis presents Reventlow as supportive of patriarchal double standards. Her discretion is judged as a positive aspect of her writing, for it protects the male characters in her novels from possible disclosure, and her female readers from potential subversion:

Niemals berührt die Reventlow das Sexuelle direkt, sie ist keine erotische Schriftstellerin und wartet auch nicht mit Enthüllungen auf. (19)

Her discretion alone becomes her redeeming quality, saving her from the charge of being an (inferior) erotic writer. She becomes the ideal woman writer, avoiding the production of subversive or disclosing texts, and failing to challenge Fritz's dominant creative male role. She is therefore presented as implicitly supporting patriarchy.

III

Fritz presents his subject through lengthy quotations, which are linked by his own brief statements. In fact half the biography consists of quotations, with one chapter comprising a single

quotation from the subject's diary ("Die Kindstaufe" [107-9]). In addition to these extensive quotations from Reventlow's own writing, Fritz also frequently refers to male texts, especially those written by Ludwig Klages, Reventlow's lover during her years in Munich. Yet rather than quoting directly from Klages's texts, Fritz cites Schröder (Klages's biographer) citing Klages:

Sie lebte gemäß Goethes 'Und ist es Trieb, so ist es Pflicht', gleichgültig ob man bei 'Trieb' an einen vergänglichen Anreiz oder eine tiefe Passion denkt, war ebenso zweifellos aus Erfahrung bekannt mit allen 'Künsten' der Liebe, ließ davon aber nie etwas durchblicken. (26)

Here Reventlow becomes the object of a series of males, of the relay of glances which communicates the process of the male gaze from generation to generation. From Goethe, who gives her position a theoretical basis, to Klages, who was an eyewitness, to Schröder who quotes Klages, to Fritz, who quotes Schröder quoting Klages, she is passed on as a passive object, a process which ends, by implication, in the appreciation and recognition of her passivity by the male reader of the biography. Further, by presenting his subject as a passive object, Fritz asserts his position in the dominant group of male voyeurs. In defining her as passive and lacking, as object passed from male to male, Fritz further deflects attention away from the passivity of the male characters, writers and especially potential male readers by presenting all males involved in the process as actively constructing his subject. The result is a voyeuristic presentation of Reventlow as object and her male observers as authoring subjects.

We can link this process with the system of suture as described by Kaja Silverman. The system of suture, she claims, sets up,

... a relay of glances between the male characters within the fiction and the male viewers in the theater audience ... one of the most effective strategies at its disposal for deflecting attention away from the passivity and lack of the viewing subject's own position is by displacing those values onto a female character within the fiction. (Needless to say, this displacement assuages the anxieties only of the male viewer; it heightens those of the female viewer). (Silverman 222)

By showing how his subject can be passed from male to male over generations, Fritz implicitly defines her as an available object of the male gaze, and as the site of male self-definition.

IV

The presentation of males as active subjects in opposition to the female object is even more evident in Fritz's description of the male characters in his biography. Reventlow is presented as passive, impulsive and living according to her sex drive:

Die selbstbestimmte Sexualität ... war für sie die höchste Trophäe der Emanzipation ... [sie] sah die eigentliche Bestimmung ihres Lebens (und aller Frauen) darin, ihre Triebe auszuleben... Franziska ... interessiert sich fürs erste mehr für die Künstler als für die Kunst... Ihr privater Mythos war die im Eros sich auslebende Frau. (9, 26, 50, 90)

Her female subjectivity is praised as lending authenticity and truth to her literature:

Es ist die Konzentration auf das Private, das Selbsterlebte, wodurch dieser lebenslange Existenzkampf so glaubhaft wirkt in den Tagebüchern. (41)

In keeping with the notion of Reventlow as passive, subjective recorder of her own experiences, Fritz privileges her diaries as

truthful recreations of her life. Yet this statement presents a closed, circular definition of women. The truth, according to Fritz, lies in the fact that women are by nature passive, introverted, and therefore subjective. Consequently, because Fritz sees women as subjective, he also views their most obviously subjective texts (by his own definition) as accurate expositions of the truth--which is that women are subjective. Fritz further argues that Reventlow expressed her passivity through passive, that is instinctive, means:

Die Wahnmoehinger Heiden ... machten ihr 'Gott weiß was für Elogen' dafür, daß sie ... aus Instinkt schon mitbrachte, was das neue Heidentum bisher nur ersehnte: Sinnlichkeit, Selbstbejahung und die nötige moralische Unbedenklichkeit dazu. (60)

Subjectivity ('Selbstbejahung', 'Sinnlichkeit') and a lack of conscious moral reasoning ('Unbedenklichkeit') are, by Fritz's definition, not based on a deliberate, programmatic theory, but are passive expressions of Reventlow's instinct. She becomes doubly passive, on the one hand representing passivity and on the other expressing passivity through passive, instinctive means. In fact, Fritz describes Reventlow as deliberately and consciously unphilosophical and apolitical:

Dabei kam sie ganz ohne Programme und Theorien aus, sie lebte in den Tag und in die Nacht hinein, im Kopf und im Bauch nur die luxuriöse Vorstellung einer auf Wohlleben, Sinnlichkeit, Kreativität und Mutterschaft gegründeten Frauenexistenz. (10)

Fritz uses Reventlow's own writing as evidence of her lack of political engagement:

Im Gesamtwerk der Gräfin, den drei Romanen, der Novellensammlung ... den Tagebüchern und Briefen kommt das Wort Politik kein einziges Mal vor. (124)

This simplistic definition of what constitutes a "political" novel undermines the possibility of political satire.⁴ Fritz avoids this by taking his subject's writing at face value and by neglecting the possibility of irony in her texts. He also fails to recognize her subversive lifestyle as a conceivably political statement. Fritz's definition of what constitutes a political text becomes applicable only to those writers who overtly and obviously construct themselves as politically active. In Fritz's biography involvement in politics becomes an exclusively male pursuit.

V

In opposition to the female object of his text, Fritz presents his male characters as great, endowed with intellectual ability, active, and in control. This is most obvious in his description of Ludwig Klages. Fritz frequently uses quotations from Klages's work in order to construct his own version of Reventlow. At the same time he is forced to admit that their relationship only lasted for four years (26). Klages is given a disproportionately significant role in Fritz's biography as the most influential male in Reventlow's life.

When introduced by Fritz, Klages is immediately defined by his intellectual and professional merits:

Ludwig Klages, Zivilisationskritiker, Graphologe und Begründer der Charakterkunde, lernte die Reventlow kennen, als er noch Chemie-Student in München war.
(26)

In this excerpt Fritz disregards the chronological sequence regarding Klages's professional interests. In Fritz's narrative order, attributes which Klages acquired after completing his studies ("Zivilisationskritiker, Graphologe und Begründer der Charakterkunde") precede his student life. This creates the illusion that he had already achieved his reputation in these areas by the time he met Reventlow. In contrast, she is presented in the most sensational manner:

description of her in the biography occurs outside the body of the main text, in an introductory quotation:

... dem innerlich freiesten und natürlichsten Menschen, dem ich begegnet bin, gleichmäßig ausgezeichnet von höchstem weiblichem Charme, gepflegtester geistiger Kultur, kritischster Klugheit, anmutigstem Humor und vollkommenster Vorurteilslosigkeit. (6)

Yet this passage was not written by Fritz, but by Erich Mühsam in his eyewitness account of Reventlow entitled "Die Gräfin" in his posthumously published Namen und Menschen. Unpolitische Erinnerungen (1949).⁵ While attempting to construct Reventlow as a great and liberated woman Fritz elevates her male contemporaries, especially Klages, to positions greater than hers and to a level of competence and power far beyond that which he assigns to his subject. Thus the most positive description of Reventlow comes from another of her male contemporaries, indicating Fritz's ambivalent stance towards his subject as both great and inferior. In privileging the male characters Fritz reaffirms his own solidarity with them, with other biographers and critics such as Székely and Schröder, and implicitly with the male reader.

VI

Fritz's description of Ludwig Klages highlights his sympathies towards the man ultimately rejected by Reventlow. The above description of Klages (63-4) follows the discussion of Reventlow's novel Von Paul zu Pedro in which she classifies males into groups--much in the same way women have been classified into the categories of virgin, mother and whore by traditional patriarchy. In Von Paul zu Pedro Reventlow isolated the male "rescuer," whom she defined as the least desirable type:

Am schlimmsten ist der Typus RETTER.... Er hält sich eben für den, der imstande sei, unser zerflattertes Liebesleben einzufangen und auf einen Hauptpunkt, nämlich sich selbst zu konzentrieren. (63)

The type "Retter" can be read as a product of patriarchal ideas. Within a patriarchal system it is essential that women see men as essential to their survival, while the males are viewed as being obliged to fulfil exactly those female needs described by Fritz: they guide their female partners, support them financially, inspire them, and attempt to create order in their lives. These are the advantages the female gains, or rather must believe she gains, as a result of being defined as a commodity available for trade between men.⁶ By constructing women as both literally and metaphorically dependent on males for their very existence, and having them believe in the patriarchal myth, the dominant group gains its most valuable ally: woman herself. Faced with the threat of a woman who challenges the concept of male control over women and female dependency on men, Fritz attempts to reverse the process by elevating Klages's position. By presenting Klages as a benevolent male Fritz undermines Reventlow's definition of the male type "Retter." Fritz further emphasizes her dependence on and exclusive need for Klages by quoting from a letter she wrote to him:

Du bist der einzige Mensch, der alles versteht und der fliegen kann. Und ich möchte noch manchmal fliegen. Und unsere Flügel sind doch noch nicht lahm, wie wir manchmal glauben. (64)

Further, Fritz seems unable to believe that Reventlow could wish to break off her relationship with Klages:

Als es zum Bruch kommt, sucht Franziska ihn noch einmal in seiner Wohnung auf, um sich mit ihm auszusprechen. Oder um ihn zurückzugewinnen? (64)

Fritz avoids having to place the blame for the break by eluding a detailed description of the events which led to it. Rather, his discussion takes the break as a *fait accompli* ("Als es zum Bruch kommt"). By following this with the hypothetical question "Oder um ihn zurückzugewinnen?," Fritz on the one hand avoids having to justify its validity, while on the other hand he asserts his control over the reader, by alluding to Reventlow's possible motives for visiting Klages. Having once made the claim, even in the form of a hypothetical question, he implicitly presents his subject as dependent on Klages and reluctant to break off her relationship with him. The possibility of her reluctance to break with Klages will influence the reader's assessment of the subsequent text.

VII

Fritz constructs his subject as passive in opposition to her active male acquaintances, yet he also compensates for his castration anxiety by overvaluing her body as a site of control. In so doing he elevates her to a traditionally male, active status. Yet at the same time Fritz appears to rest uneasy with the possibility of a controlling female. As shown in Chapter Three, traditional patriarchy sees the "monster woman," that is the woman who appropriates a "male" role or refuses to accept the submissive role assigned to her by patriarchy, as a threat. In response to this possible threat, Fritz undermines his subject's dominance by attempting to construct her as ridiculous and marginalized.

Fritz presents Reventlow as staging her own private emancipation through her body. One manifestation of her sexual liberation, according to Fritz, is her occasional activity as a prostitute. Fritz quotes her as seeing prostitution as a "*legitimes Frauenrecht*" (71), and as the most honest solution to her dilemma which was the result of her desire for freedom and need of money. This attitude, according to Fritz, caused her to refuse any long-term contract with a male, be it marital or extra-marital:

Entweder sie liebte, aber es war kein Geld da. Oder das Geld war vorhanden, aber sie ließ sich ihre Liebe nicht abkaufen. So war sie darauf gekommen, daß in den bürgerlichen Verhältnissen um 1900 das Sich-Verkaufen noch die 'anständigste' Lösung sei. (84-5)

Here Fritz ignores the point often made by nineteenth-century feminists that marriage was "simply a legalized and mystified prostitution."⁷ Reventlow chose freedom and illegal prostitution over marriage, taking the feminists' view to its logical conclusion. Yet while she appears to be taking control of her relationships, rejecting the traditional definitions of women as either wives or mistresses (both categories denying women their freedom of choice) Fritz defines her as a dilettante even in matters sexual:

Daß sie auch [in der Prostitution], trotz vieler Versuche, auf keinen grünen Zweig kam, dafür machte sie allein ihren 'Dilettantismus' verantwortlich, Skrupel moralischer Art besaß sie nicht. (85)

Fritz follows this statement with a quotation from Reventlow's novel Von Paul zu Pedro, in which she defines prostitution as "die beste Möglichkeit ... und eigentlich auch die anständigste" (85). Fritz avoids explicitly judging his subject's attitude towards prostitution, rather quoting from Marianne Weber's Die Frauen und die Liebe. Weber claims that Reventlow's definition of prostitution was the result of a "schrankenlose Lebensgier [die] nicht nur den Glauben an die Liebe, sondern auch die echten Liebeskräfte und damit die Substanz einer Frauenseele zerstört hat" (85). Fritz's introduction to this statement runs:

Ausgerechnet Marianne Weber, die Frau des berühmten Soziologen Max Weber, stellte zwanzig Jahre später ... Franziska zu Reventlow in die Ecke der moralisch-entarteten Frauen. (85)

The qualification "ausgerechnet" implies that Marianne Weber, the wife of a reputable and progressive sociologist, ought to view

prostitution in a more liberated manner. Fritz thus implies that female emancipation consists of women's right to express her sexuality as she herself sees fit. By presenting Weber's point of view in this manner, Fritz implies that Reventlow's opinion might be used as an example to modern feminists.

While Fritz constructs himself as a progressive male supportive of (his own definition of) women's emancipatory rights, he is reluctant to emphasize Franziska zu Reventlow's ability to gain power via her sexuality. He claims her activity as prostitute never assisted her in gaining financial security. Rather, her consequent passivity and dependence on men lay in her unprofessional attitude towards the sex trade:

Hätte sie ihre sexuellen Triebe besser genutzt, wäre sie mehr auf Gewinn als auf Genuß ausgewesen, dann hätte es mit dem Geld wahrscheinlich besser geklappt. (132-3)

Incapable of utilizing her sexual advantages in an organized and practical manner Reventlow remains passively manoeuvred by her (albeit emancipatory) sexdrive.

VIII

When confronted with Reventlow's excessive sexuality her male acquaintances respond by becoming passively enchanted:

Ludwig Klages, ein Jahr jünger als die Reventlow, hat mehrfach versucht, mäßigend auf ihre Ausschweifungen zu wirken, auf ihre Liebessucht wie auf ihre Zigarettensucht. Ohne Erfolg, was er um so mehr bedauern mußte, als er ihr buchstäblich verfallen war. (30-2)

As a result of Reventlow's disorderly ("Liebesunordnung") and addictive ("süchtig") lifestyle, Klages loses his rightful position of control. By emphasizing their age-difference, Fritz implies that Klages could not compete with this older, more experienced and

aggressive woman, thus excusing his enchantment. Displaying solidarity with the powerless Klages, Fritz defines Reventlow's aggressive sexual behaviour as an inherent disease. Her "Liebessucht" becomes the manifestation of an extraneous force beyond the control of both Reventlow and Klages. Klages's failure to temper her extravagant lifestyle becomes tragic not for the subject of the "Liebes- und Zigarettensucht," but for the passive male who is at risk of being devoured by Reventlow's unconstrainable sexuality.

Fritz further claims that not only males but also females are under threat of contagion by the polyandric woman:

Franziskas Lebenswandel muß ansteckend gewirkt haben unter den vielen Töchtern aus guten Häusern, die damals nach Schwabing kamen, 'gärenshalber', wie die Gräfin schrieb. (32)

Reventlow's influence on girls who resided in Schwabing only temporarily, and who later had to return to their good homes, is seen as subversive and dangerous. Although Fritz asserts that her emancipation was personal ("Ihr privater Mythos war die im Eros sich auslebende Frau" [90]), when her liberal sexual ideas threaten other members of society, and through them the prevailing ideology, Fritz constructs them as the manifestation of a disease:

Die Gräfin zeigt sich souverän wie immer. Sie zitiert-- 32jährig--den Geist ihrer Jungmädchenblüte--'das allererste Erwachen', 'der früheste Frühling', und beweist ihr Talent zur erotischen Schizophrenie.... Manchmal vermerkt sie im Tagebuch zwei oder drei Liebhaber unter demselben Datum. (75, 77)

Fritz typically associates female sexuality with youth, constructing the sexual expressions of a 32-year-old as excessive, emphasized by the fact that the term "Jungmädchenblüte" implies virginity. Given Reventlow's promiscuous lifestyle, this

noun serves to reduce the subject in the diary to an object of ridicule.

The description of Reventlow actively enjoying her sexuality runs adverse to the patriarchal construction of passive female sexuality. Again Fritz avoids presenting Reventlow as an autonomous sexual being by defining her sexuality as pathological. It becomes the expression of "erotische Schizophrenie." The presentation of her deviant sexuality culminates in the statement:

Manches an dieser 'erosdurchleuchteten' Aktivität mutet nymphomanisch an. (77)

Faced with a woman who is able to control males and influence innocent, bourgeois daughters Fritz responds by investing his subject with a limited autonomy, only to then undermine her sexual autonomy by defining it as the manifestation of her pathological state.

IX

As already discussed, in her novel Von Paul zu Pedro Reventlow constructs male stereotypes, which she collectively names "Paul" or "Pedro." After quoting her definition of "Paul" Fritz writes:

So schrieb sie in den 'Amouresken' [Von Paul zu Pedro], diesen erotischen Konfessionen einer Frau, worin der Mann der Gründerzeit um Neunzehnhundert, der Held einer männlich-martialischen Epoche, zur Spielfigur degradiert ist. (10)

According to this statement, the potent, virile, and militant male is degraded not by the definition of "Paul" itself, but by the fact that in being classified he becomes a type, thus losing his ability to be an autonomous subject. The extract from Von Paul zu Pedro

which precedes the above evaluation does not appear to be inherently contentious or threatening to male dominance:

Paul ist immer etwas Lustiges, Belangloses, ohne Bedenken und ohne Konsequenzen. Aber er kommt immer wieder, wenn auch jedesmal in etwas veränderter Form und Gestalt.... Paul ist auch selten eifersüchtig, wahrscheinlich, weil er sich seiner wechsellvollen Vergänglichkeit dunkel bewußt ist. (9-10)

In fact "Paul" is Reventlow's preferred type. But by defining the male as object of female desire, she subverts the prevailing order. She must therefore bear the consequences of refusing to accept the norms of patriarchal ideology. Fritz's construction of "Paul" as a symbol of male degradation is followed by the statement,

Ihren Freiheitswillen mußte sie teuer bezahlen: Zeit ihres Lebens existierte sie in ungesicherten Verhältnissen, hatte weder einen festen Beruf noch ein regelmäßiges Einkommen, oft war sie ohne Obdach und ihre Habe verpfändet. (10)

Reventlow's punishment becomes the denial of that male favour which women are forced by patriarchy to see as essential to their very existence: financial security.

Fritz directly refers to the process of the female appropriation of a role traditionally defined as male when he writes, with reference to Von Paul zu Pedro:

Inhaltlich passiert etwas Neues: Die Frau tritt aus der Rolle des Gesprächsobjekts heraus und erscheint als Souverän. Die Männer spielen den dummen August und werden von den Launen eines weiblichen Subjekts (der Gräfin) zum Narren gehalten. (79)

Again, according to Fritz, the text Von Paul zu Pedro itself does nothing to ridicule men. Rather, it merely describes an

autonomous female subject. However, the subject-position Reventlow appropriates in her novel evokes Fritz's own point of view that her novel serves to degrade the male characters. By using colloquial language ("den dummen August spielen," "zum Narren gehalten werden"), Fritz illustrates his condescending attitude towards the woman writer, undermining the significance of her subject-position by reducing the opposing male characters to ridicule. These male characters, with whom Fritz visibly sympathizes and identifies, become the mere whim of female fancy, subjected to the "Launen eines weiblichen Subjekts."

X

As shown, Fritz's reading of Reventlow's life and work covertly supports patriarchal ideology. Yet on the surface Fritz seems to feel obliged to occasionally refer to the feminist movement, possibly as a result of the renewed interest in feminist issues at the time he was writing his biography. However, while Fritz attempts to construct himself as a liberated and progressive supporter of feminism his references to the movement appear as simplistic and uninformed at best, and as condescending at worst. Radical feminism is referred to only in passing, and often in an ambiguous way.

In her essay "Viragines oder Hetären?" Reventlow defined women as luxury objects for male consumption. Fritz quotes from it, that woman was made,

... zur Leichtigkeit, zur Freude, zur Schönheit--ein Luxusobjekt in des Wortes schönster Bedeutung, ein beseeltes, lebendes, selbstempfindendes Luxusobject, das Schutz, Pflege und günstige Lebensbedingungen braucht, um ganz das sein zu können, was es eben sein kann. (93)

It is debatable whether this essay was meant to be taken literally, yet Fritz interprets it as a manifestation of Reventlow's view on feminism, failing to even contemplate the possibility that the essay might have been intended as satire. Reventlow writes that

women were not meant to engage in labour, and Fritz responds to this statement by declaring:

Als Begründung für dieses der Arbeit entrückte Frauentasein in Luxus und Geborgenheit führt die Reventlow ... eine Kategorie an, die noch vor einigen Jahren unter Feministinnen einen Aufschrei der Entrüstung ausgelöst hätte: die 'Natur der Frau'. Heute, da die Forderung nach Gleichstellung mit dem Mann im Sinne einer über alle biologischen Unterschiede hinweggehenden Gleichbehandlung in der fortgeschrittenen Frauenszene als rigide gilt ... steht die Reventlow ... ganz auf der Höhe der aktuellen feministischen Argumentation. (93)

By presenting Reventlow as paradigm of today's women's movement, Fritz presents radical nineteenth-century feminists as deviating from the true definition of feminism. Their points of view become mere temporary fancies of that particularly subversive era. By contrast, Reventlow is shown to be too independent to succumb to their ideas: "Von den Frauenrechtlerinnen läßt sich die Reventlow nicht in Anspruch nehmen" (90).

By Fritz's definition, feminism has returned full circle, only now achieving the essential and fundamental insight, that biological differences cannot (and should not be attempted to) be overcome. Fritz's deterministic presentation of gender differences serves to reaffirm and justify the patriarchal construction of women as inherently subordinate, passive, and as objects of male pleasure.

On the basis of Fritz's presentation of Reventlow as privately emancipated woman, he indicates her lack of interest in the late nineteenth-century women's movement:

Ihr Beitrag zur Emanzipation war sonst mehr auf das Praktische beschränkt, oder erweitert.... Offensichtlich hielt sie ihre eigene Lebenspraxis für subversiver als etwa die Debatten um das Stimmrecht.... In die Annalen der Frauenbewegung ist die Reventlow nicht eingegangen. Dafür besaß sie zu wenig Korpsgeist, war ihre Vorstellung von der Emanzipation zu individualistisch.... Nichts Blaustrümpfiges war and ihr. (25, 91)

By defining her emancipation as private and pragmatic, Fritz diffuses the perceived danger posed by a militant feminist movement. To Fritz, emancipation in its ideal form constitutes the sexual liberation of the individual woman as opposed to the wide-ranging demands of the "Radikalfeministinnen um die Jahrhundertwende" (90). In order to render organized nineteenth-century feminism powerless, Fritz constructs it as unnatural and deviant by quoting at length from "Viragines oder Hetären?":

'Es kann einem Angst und Bange werden', schrieb sie da über die Feministinnen um Neunzehnhundert, 'wenn man diese 'Extremsten' in geteiltem Loden-Rock und gestärkter weißer Weste auf den Katheder steigen ... und mit einer Stimme wie eine Baß-Klarinette über 'Das Woib' (sic) reden hört.... Solange die Frauenbewegung die Weiber vermännlichen will, ist sie die ausgesprochene Feindin aller erotischer Kultur.' (91, 90)

Having constructed nineteenth-century feminists as adversely militant, threatening, and objects of ridicule through Reventlow's own text, Fritz renders all further references to feminists and the "Frauenszene" expressions of his condescension. By contrast, the various forms of modern feminism become a unified entity ("die Frauenszene"), and the site of academic debate alone ("heute

steht die Reventlow ... auf der Höhe der aktuellen feministischen Argumentation" [93]). Today's feminist movement is dispossessed of its former power, as it becomes an appropriate and transparent object of the male gaze: "Ganz ähnliche Tendenzen sind auch heute wieder auf der Frauenszene zu *beobachten* " (114) (my italics).

Fritz constructs Reventlow as implicitly and explicitly supportive of patriarchy through her passivity and her writing, as well as subversive regarding traditionally accepted female roles. As a result of her reluctance to fully accept patriarchal demands placed on women, her punishment is presented as the just denial of male support. Her subsequent financial disempowerment is seen as curtailing an excessive need to work, which in turn excludes her from actively participating in a feminist movement which would have all women placed in the same undesirable position:

Den Frauen und sich selbst wollte sie das Berufsleben ersparen; in einer Zeit, als die führenden Sprecherinnen der Emanzipation in der Zulassung zu allen Berufen die endgültige Lösung der Frauenfrage sahen.... [Reventlow] war viel zu sehr mit dem Überleben beschäftigt, um noch Zeit zu finden für den Kampf um Gleichheit mit dem Mann und gegen die Männer. (88, 92)

In the final instance the maintenance of the prevailing system is, according to Fritz, in the interests of both men and women.

As we have observed, women are constructed within patriarchal ideology as the site of lack and as passive receivers of the (active) male gaze. However, this interaction is not without danger for the seemingly dominant male, for the definition of the female as void invokes in the male an anxiety of becoming like her. Her lack forces him to acknowledge the possibility of his own castration. In an attempt to exorcize the resulting fear, the male writer can either invest his subject with phallic power, thus avoiding the very possibility of perceiving her as a void, or he can

construct her castrated condition as the result of sickness or wrong-doing, showing that her lack is the effect of a prior offence, and not its cause.

Fritz's biography comprises the interaction of both possibilities. Initially attributing phallic power to his subject's body by overvaluing it, he must subsequently establish his own authorial role as well as the dominant role of her male associates by undermining the very potency he ascribes her. He therefore subverts her power by constructing the male characters of his biography--and by implication himself as biographer--as even more endowed than she was, and by defining her excessive sexuality as a manifestation of her diseased state. In this manner Franziska zu Reventlow becomes object, not subject, of his narrative, subjected to the gaze of her biographer, of his male characters and of the male readers of the biography.

Notes

¹ Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford UP, 1983).

² Leon Edel, "The Figure under the Carpet," Biography as High Adventure. Life-Writers Speak on Their Art, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 18-9.

³ Fritz's professional credentials are listed in a brief summary entitled "Der Autor" which I quote in full: "Helmut Fritz, 1939 in Salmünster/Hessen geboren, studierte in Frankfurt Soziologie und Psychologie. Als Mitarbeiter renommierter Zeitungen und fast aller westdeutscher Sender hat er sich einen Namen gemacht. Für seine Feature-Arbeiten wurde er mehrfach ausgezeichnet, unter anderem mit dem Kurt-Magnus-Preis und einem Hauptpreis der Internationalen Film- und Fernsehjury in Oberhausen. Er lebt in Frankfurt. Der vorliegende Reventlow-Band ist seine erste Buchveröffentlichung" (4).

⁴ One striking example is George Orwell's Animal Farm.

⁵ Erich Mühsam (1878-1934), also a writer, lived permanently in Munich from 1909 and knew Reventlow personally.

⁶ According to Simone de Beauvoir, patriarchy in early societies "opposes a group of men to a group of men; women constitute a part of the property which each of these groups possesses and which is a medium of exchange between them" (The Second Sex, [London: Picador, 1988], 102).

⁷ Susan Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 88.

CONCLUSION

The methods applied by the four biographers whose works have been discussed here correspond to the issues addressed by a large number of twentieth-century biographical essayists. Although the theories proposed by critics on biography vary, the problems they address are firmly based on the underlying presumptions of humanist ideology: Is biography a product of fact or fiction? Should the biographer take a subjective or an objective approach? How much of a subject's inner life should be revealed? Is the truth discernible from an accumulation of facts or through the narrative structuring of these facts by selection, arrangement, omission? Should the biographer identify with his subject or maintain a distance from her? These questions affirm the humanist belief that there is an essential truth which can be revealed by the astute biographer through language which is deemed referential. The biographies discussed here can be read as manifestations of the narrative model which correlates to this world-view, the classic realist novel.

Although modern twentieth-century theory--structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminism--has strongly challenged the ideology of liberal humanism, biography is understood by most readers and biographers alike to represent the objective recreation of a past life, to "evoke and dramatize a life through novelistic techniques but not invention itself"¹ and to make the subject "live in a living world."² In order to present the literary market with a viable commodity, biographers are obliged to produce texts which conform to the expectations of their readers. They thus enter into a dialogue with them through their texts, presenting themselves in a manner which is acceptable to themselves and in conformity with their evaluation of their readers. However, this process is not overt. Rather, it is evident only through a close reading of the way the biographer constructs himself in opposition to his "other." In the case of Cronwright-Schreiner this "other" constitutes his deceased wife; in Meintjes's case the preceding biographer, Cronwright-

Schreiner; in Székely's case his academic peers; and in Fritz's case the general, non-academic reader. By presenting themselves in a particular way through their particular discourse, biographers appropriate subject-positions which can be read as responses to their assumed interlocutors.

As has been shown, in a post-Freudian, post-Saussurean age the assumptions of classic realism can no longer be taken for granted. The very fact that several biographies presenting the same subject's life can be so disparate, yet equally valid, suggests that there can be no definitive order of reality. Nor can it be said that the truth constitutes the sum of all biographies written about a subject. If six different biographies can be written about one subject, then so can sixteen, sixty or indeed six hundred. The number of possible biographies is infinite, which means that, while each biography presents one version of the truth as perceived by one individual at a given time in a particular place, the essential truth in which traditional biographers believe, cannot exist. Each biographer produces a subject-position through discourse, a discourse of which he is also a product. This discourse can never be transcended, and as a result "There is no outside-the-text."³

By challenging the notion of a fixed reality, modern literary critics challenge the very genre of biography. In a changing world, where the individual--the biographer and his subject alike --has been dis-located from his earlier central position, the possibility of recreating an individual's experiences becomes tenuous. More and more biographers are responding to this change, acknowledging the subjective and fictionalizing aspects of their work. Ira B. Nadel describes Virginia Woolf's Orlando (the fictionalized life of Roger Fry) as an early example of how "the limitations of biography can be overcome by the creative writer."⁴ He claims Orlando asserts "the narrator's personal freedom expressed in the time shifts, style and scope [through] synchronic narrative, figurative language, shifting presentation of personality, scenic and historic variety and vibrant language" (Fiction, Fact and Form 140). According to Nadel, Orlando

represents one solution to the limits placed on biography by traditional humanism.

Elsewhere Nadel presents another example of creative biographical narrative in Wolfgang Hildesheimer's Marbot, which describes the life of Sir Andrew Marbot (1810-30). This biography is, according to Nadel, "An unusual demonstration of a new twist in 'biography'" as the entire work is a hoax, a fiction complete with "ancestry, documentation, dates, photographs, published references and testimony from figures like Goethe, Schopenhauer and Byron."⁵

Yet in the final analysis it is the reader who determines what is to be classed as a "biography." This reader will most likely define Virginia Woolf's text as a biographical novel, while Marbot will not attract her in the first place, as she is inclined to choose her reading material on the basis of the subject described therein whom she believes to have existed in a realm she perceives as real, and who she defines as having been great, exemplary and/or exceptional even in advance of her reading. This reader, intent on finding a key to her own experiences, and produced by humanist discourse, will privilege those works which propose to give her a version of the truth which is ordered chronologically, reproduces a cause-effect model, and which is written in an authoritative tone--a narrative, that is, which appears "real." Yet according to Nadel, the notion of the biographer's authority is a fallacy: "the biographer actually achieves greater reader interest while laying claim to the ultimate fiction--that what is provided is the 'authoritative' or 'definitive' life" ("Narrative and the Popularity of Biography" 136).

Despite the achievements of modern feminist theory, today's readers and biographers alike are still products and producers of a discourse in which a patriarchal world-view is firmly inscribed. In this thesis I have shown how, while these four biographers enter into a dialogue with their subjects and their readers, they inadvertently reproduce the patriarchal norms inherent in their discourse. In so doing they become visible

products of the particular ideology of their specific time and place. Seen in the context of their ideological, societal, and historical environment, their biographies constitute valid and appropriate representations of their female subjects. Yet in recent years feminist theory has strongly challenged patriarchal norms which attempt to construct women as objects of the male gaze and as subordinate members of society.

According to Jonathan Culler, "[w]omen's experience, many feminist critics claim, will lead them to value works differently from their male counterparts, who may regard the problems women characteristically encounter as of limited interest."⁶ This view calls for a reassessment of women's writing and women's lives based on modern feminist literary criticism. While, as we have seen, there can never be a definitive biography on any subject, male or female, modern biographers of female subjects need to challenge assumptions, which are founded on humanist ideology, by questioning the assertions that all women's writing must necessarily be autobiographical, that women not educated in a formal manner must inevitably write emotionally and subjectively, and that women's "real" lives can indeed be recreated in a discourse which is essentially patriarchal. While modern readings of women's texts and lives will never reveal more "real" subjects, a reinterpretation of nineteenth-century women's lives based on modern feminist theory might provide the reader with a narrative which is more easily reconciled with the discourse of her own time and place.

Notes

¹ Stephen B. Oates, Biography as High Adventure, Life-Writers Speak on Their Art (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) xiii.

² Mark Schorer, "The Burdens of Biography," Biography as High Adventure, Life-Writers Speak on Their Art (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986) 87.

- 3 Jacques Derrida, Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) 102.
- 4 Ira B. Nadel, Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984) 140.
- 5 Ira B. Nadel, "Narrative and the Popularity of Biography," Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature 20.4 (1987): 139.
- 6 Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction, Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (London: Routledge, 1993) 45.

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