

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE FEMINIST FIN-DE-SIÈCLE AND A NEW READING OF OLIVE SCHREINER'S *FROM MAN TO MAN*

By Rose Lovell-Smith

BY THE LAST DECADES OF THE nineteenth century, the various aspects of the “Woman Question” had drawn many women into public controversy. Their published writings commonly advance both moral and practical arguments, and often cite supporting statistical evidence and scholarly opinions as well. But not all their writing is of this kind. Feminist¹ argument around the turn of the century also generated some fine rhetorical flights which stand out from their more prosaic surroundings. Passages of elevated and figurative persuasive writing are found in essays, monographs, and occasionally novels. Today these writings may be found in the many anthologies of “first-wave” feminist writing, which draw on the London journals, especially the *Contemporary Review*. Female activists in America often use a similar style. Consistent features in this rhetoric suggest that something like a distinctive feminist authorial position had developed.

In the first part of this essay, a description of these features of feminist polemical writing is followed by discussion of an associated question: whether the feminist habit of blending scientific and religious references might indicate that there was a specifically feminist tendency to reconcile the world-views of Darwinism and religious belief. The second part of my essay is a reading of Olive Schreiner's *From Man to Man*, which, in my view, offers an extended instance of a similar rhetorical self-positioning by a feminist author. My experience has been that recognising this particular trend in the feminist fin-de-siècle entailed not just a new reading of Schreiner's novel but also a reassessment of its literary merits. Before turning to Schreiner, however, it is necessary to describe this turn-of-the-century feminist rhetoric more fully. Its characteristics include frequent allusions to science and religion, millennialism, and a tendency to refer to or even rewrite familiar Bible passages so as to subvert them to feminist purposes.

Late-century feminist polemic often draws authority from science *and* religion: even within the same sentence or the same metaphor. Social purity campaigner Jane Ellice Hopkins, for instance, in an essay on child prostitution titled “The Apocalypse of Evil,”

blends science and religion — physical laws and the geological record somehow get welded on to the building of God's temple:

No fall but carries with it the force that can be converted into a rise; . . . no effort so weak and insignificant but, laying hold of these mighty forces, and laid hold of by them in return, can build up the great temple of the future, as the great World-Power builds up His eternal marble of broken shells. (339)

Another tactic is an explicit argument that science and religion agree in endorsing the writer's position, as when Frances Willard, the American temperance and suffrage campaigner, claims in *The New Review* in 1894 that "every devout teacher of natural law is a teacher of religion" or that "the great law of continence and chastity" is "unbroken in their natural state by any of the lower orders of warm-blooded animals" (687).² And equally useful is the counterbalance, here used by Frances Swiney, a social purity campaigner and suffragist leader (she founded, and became the president of, the Cheltenham Women's Suffrage Society in 1896). Swiney argued in 1907:

Men have sought in women only a body. They have possessed that body. They have made it the refuse heap of sexual pathology, when they should have revered it as the Temple of God. (Qtd. in McGibben 42)³

Victorian exaltation of womanly virtue and reference to God's temple assist Swiney to resist contemporary male professional encroachment onto the study of female sexuality.

These feminist habits of argument are not surprising. Nature, on the one hand, and God, on the other, had long been used to sanction the prevailing unevenness of the relations of the sexes. Small wonder, then, that women writers with subversive intentions often make swift acknowledgement of these twin (or rival) authorities: typical is Edna Kenton's "That women should refuse to be any longer servants to men, before God, or in the eyes of Nature" (1913, "A Study of the Old 'New Women'" qtd. in Miller 1). Similarly, an important American intellectual advocate of women's rights, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, in a much earlier (1875) argument in favor of the evolved equality of the sexes, *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, is less than reverent in describing the bases of male superiority:

Man is physically and mentally the greater, Woman the less; he the Ordained or the Evolved superior, she the Heaven-appointed or the Natural-selection-produced inferior. (184)

Blackwell uses the counterbalance with a cancelling-out effect, making each discourse undermine the authority of other.⁴ These female voices have learnt either to acknowledge and to powerfully synthesize, or to counterbalance and thus undermine scientific and religious claims to define woman. The rival world views have actually become a source of strength for feminism.

A teleological tendency is also noteworthy in this feminist rhetoric, no doubt partly inspired by the significant date of 1900. Scientific references often relate Darwin's or other ideas about evolution to the future. Religious reference is often millennial. Clearly, feminists looked to the passing of the old age and the birth of a new one:⁵ thus Olive Schreiner, arguing in *Woman and Labour* (1911) that modern civilization has released

women from the incessant toil of the past, presents her vision of a new world in Biblical terms: “We also have our dream of a Garden: but it lies in a distant future” (282).⁶ On the other hand, Emily Pfeiffer, a poet, playwright, and novelist as well as essayist, presented in *The Contemporary Review* in February 1881 an ironic apocalypse, a vision of devolution resulting from reckless tampering with the sanctity of marriage:

[I]t can never be forgotten that the companion of man is a priestess of a temple whose desecration is his ruin. . . . When the time shall come that we have cast away the marriage pledge to progress, it is presumable that we shall have commenced our downward course, and be on our way back to the ascidian,⁷ and through that to some wholly molluscos creature preparatory to the final extinction. (Qtd. in Lewis 378)

Pfeiffer is described by Kathleen Hickok in a recent essay on non-canonical women poets as one who believed that “social progress and evolutionary change are divinely inspired” (18). A sonnet by Pfeiffer, “The Chrysalis” (1876), which Hickok quotes in full (17), is so similar in its rhetorical effects (movement from geology to cherubim) to those described in my essay that perhaps direct influence by Pfeiffer on the next generation, rather than a shared social and intellectual milieu, should be postulated. At any rate, feminist millennialism obviously also derives from shared religious experience: it draws especially often on Genesis and Revelation, the Bible’s books of first and last things.

Many promises of a world redeemed or renewed are incorporated into advocating women’s causes. In 1899 Hopkins uses imagery from Genesis and Revelation even in a discussion of sex education for girls in *The Power of Womanhood*:

Sure I am that if we will accept this deeper and larger ideal, and endeavour, however imperfectly, to work it out on the earth, in the midst of it, as in the old garden ideal, will be found the tree of life; but then its very leaves will be for the healing of the nations. (Qtd. in Jeffreys 448)

By her reference to Revelation 22.2, Hopkins effectively endows sex education with the power to end one age and initiate another. But such power was often attributed to some change in relations between the sexes. Elizabeth Blackwell, the pioneering woman doctor, addressing colleagues in 1897 on the topic “Medical Responsibility in Relation to the Contagious Diseases Acts,” stated that “the redemption of our sexual relations from evil to good, rests more imperatively upon [you], than upon any other single class in society” (qtd. in Kent 134).⁸ Hopkins’s “The Apocalypse of Evil” uses another technique, opening with quotations from Tennyson’s “The Passing of Arthur” to signal that “this last dim weird battle of the West,” as Hopkins calls the “conflict with the degradation of woman and its causes” (332) marks the end of one age and the initiation of another. Hopkins even exhorts her readers, piously, to take heart from the greatness of the task: “We surely need, as a first step to strong hopeful action, to see something of what God is working out by it, to see it as a part of a vast redemptive whole” (339).

Along with the millennial thrust of this rhetoric go noteworthy figurative passages which often rewrite familiar scripture readings. One important metaphor in the feminist millennium is the tree of life, a symbol which had probably come to stand in itself for a blended world-view, as its Biblical centrality was matched by its importance in Darwin’s

Origin of Species (171–72) as well as in numerous pictorial representations of an evolutionary “tree” of many branches (see Figure 11). Rosaleen Love in “Darwinism and Feminism” (117) and Joyce Avrech Berkman in *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner* (102–03, 268 n11) both comment on Schreiner’s use of this symbol. But another notable feminist tree of life is found in suffragist Elizabeth Martyn’s “The case of the

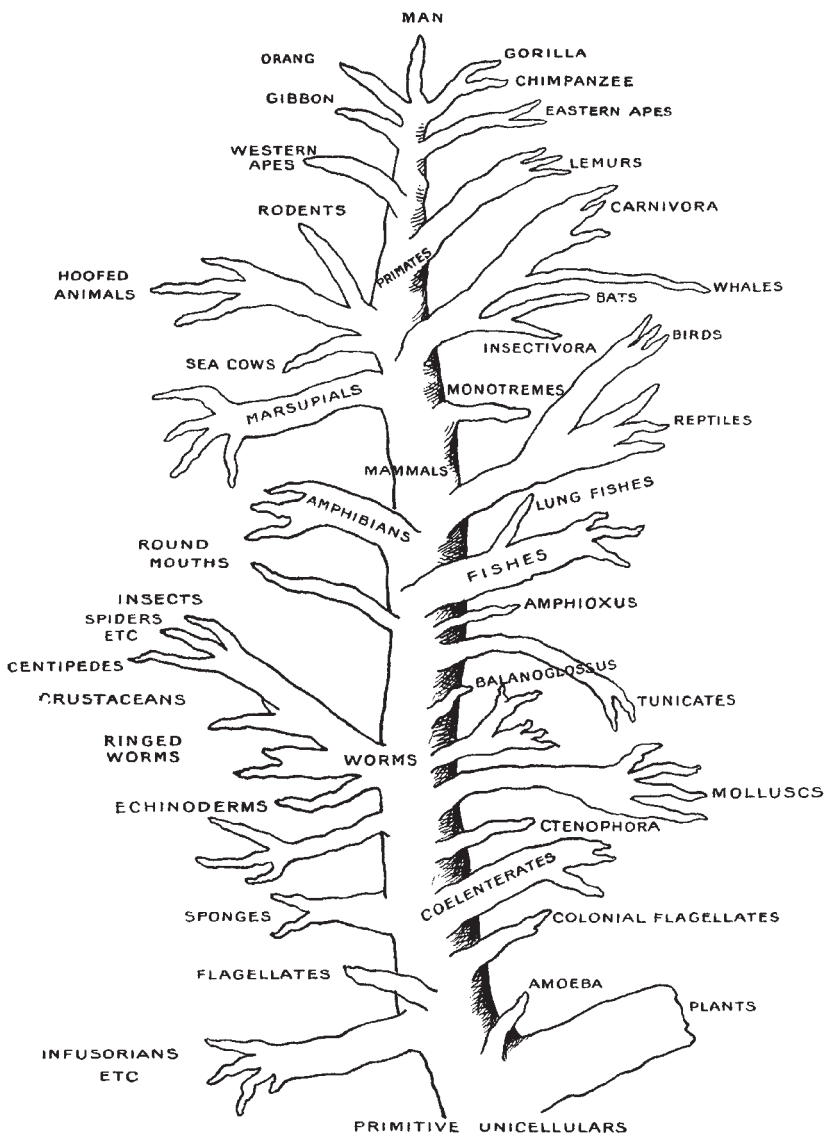


Figure 11. “The Tree of Life.” Drawing, from J. A. S. Watson, *Evolution* (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1915): frontispiece.

helots” (1894), where a tree rather like Darwin’s represents the determination of women to continue their struggle for justice and freedom:

It reminds me of nothing so much as the life in seed and tree, the life that is so strong that overlying mould, nay, even overlying stone, is pierced to make way for its coming, so strong that all the strength of gravitation cannot pull it back or hinder it from standing in uprightness; so calmly, silently, grandly triumphant that air and sunshine, and rain and dew are but its ministers. And it grows: it will not lie low upon the ground . . . Branch after branch, twig after twig is put out, and, as for the leaves — it may be that the leaves are for the healing of the nations. (Qtd. in Lewis 464)

This surely is still a moving rhetoric — its naturalistic and visionary tree as an image of the suffrage campaign, with assimilation of words from Revelation into its climax, is representative, distinctive, and fascinating. In another example of subverted scripture, a prophetic role for the “New Woman” is claimed by Sarah M. Amos in an 1894 *Contemporary Review* essay called “The Evolution of the Daughters”:

Certainly the restrictions which produce the feeble-witted, earth-bound Dodo, must give way to the freedom which will give the angels in our houses room to grow their six strong wings — two for personal dignity and beauty, two for spiritual elevation, and two with which to fly on serviceable errands for humanity. (520)

Amos’s neat subversion of the “angel in the house” cliché commonly attributed to Patmore, her female appropriation of Isaiah’s visionary seraphim (Isa. 6.2), and the typical “evolution” reference, construct a writer both playful and fervently serious about her message. Here, as elsewhere, by asserting that a proper relationship between the sexes *is* the source of redemption, *is* (simultaneously) the goal of evolution, this new polemic forces feminism into history. It does not matter for reader or author in such passages whether history is conceived of as progressive and reformist, evolved, or Christian. This feminist rhetoric assimilates all three views, visions like Martyn’s or Amos’s becoming in themselves the prophetic site or location in which the re-creation of the world is already taking place. In such writing a changed state of gender relations brings about the ultimate resolution or final state of affairs.

Such a distinctive rhetorical self-positioning by women activists and polemicists must raise a number of questions. The most intriguing question is historical — does this rhetoric suggest a specifically feminist tendency to reconcile the evolutionary and scriptural views of the origins and the ultimate destiny of humanity? It is very possible that this tendency existed, although some other views of Darwinism and feminism must be acknowledged.

Peter Bowler, Darwin scholar and biographer, announced in 1993 that “the war between science and religion is something of a myth” (*Darwinism* 37), continuing: “[b]y the 1870s most educated people had accepted evolutionism — but they had certainly not become atheists” (38). At first sight Bowler here appears to contradict his own earlier statement that “[o]pposition to Darwinism, far from diminishing as the century progressed, actually grew in strength after the 1870s” (*Charles Darwin* 154). Bowler can be better understood, however, as fundamentally in accord with Robert M. Young’s 1970 examination of various reconciliations of the two world views. Young’s position was that

while the debate between science and religion appears to polarize and intensify as the century progresses, hostile responses to Darwinism were really becoming more intellectually unsophisticated, while conscious reconciliations of the two theories of the origins of human nature were the domain of “the intelligentsia” (23). I will return to the somewhat elitist angle of Young and Bowler: clearly, however, in the view of these experts, given that most (not all) women activists had good incomes and good educations, a specifically feminist tendency to reconcile the claims of religion and Darwin is not at all unlikely.

In their use of scriptural reference, though, turn-of-the-century feminists resemble many other contemporaries, who often refer their political aims to God. Is anything more than a mere habit of allusion at work in apparent feminist fervor? I believe it is, for the link between religion and political activism on woman’s rights questions was long-standing and is demonstrated, for instance, in the close affinity in many countries between the suffrage and Christian temperance campaigns. Religious conviction also animated the social purity campaigns. Women were moved to disapproved-of public action by religion: in the *English Woman’s Journal* of July 1858 Mary Carpenter called on “Christian women” to join the work in reformatories, promising that a “true woman will surmount all obstacles by the God-sent strength of her very weakness” (“Women’s work in the reformatory movement,” qtd. in Hollis 236). Giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Contagious Diseases in 1871, Josephine Butler said “We have the Word of God in our hands — the law of God in our consciences” (qtd. in Hollis 211).⁹ “We should not . . . be surprised,” writes Philippa Levine, “by the frequent invocation of the divine, and the seemingly devout stand which so many feminists of this period [1850–1900] took” (31). With such backgrounds and such associates, feminist women were unlikely to jettison religious habits of thought and reference, and instead, as has been seen, they exploited while remoulding them in their published writings.

A feminist Darwinism may seem at first sight a different matter. Belief in evolution may have been the predictable position, as Bowler remarks, of “most educated people” in the late century, but the difficulty here is that this situation now looks unexpected to 1990s feminists: misogyny has repeatedly been demonstrated in Darwin’s and related scientific writing.¹⁰ However, there has always been another feminist position on evolution. I have already noted Emily Pfeiffer’s early (1876) poetic reconciliations of evolutionary and religious imagery. Rosaleen Love, dealing with the lives and work of Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, shows that “the evolutionary metaphor” could also be exploited by feminist writers around 1900 to their own advantage (“Darwinism and Feminism” 113–14 and passim). “Scientific theories of women’s place” says Love “have been manipulated by women in a variety of ingenious ways” (127). And Alan P. Barr, in a comprehensive review of the evolutionists’ response to issues raised by the debate about women,¹¹ points to other individuals who espoused evolutionary science but resisted evolutionary sexism. Helen Gardener, a suffragist and colleague of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, dealt with brain-weight arguments and the subversion of biological arguments by social bias (30–31); Antoinette Brown Blackwell rebutted Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* in her *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (36); Julia Ward Howe and M. Carey Thomas resisted arguments about women’s unsuitability for higher education (34, 37). Barr also notes Gilman’s radical position on work, the family, and maternity (38–39) — although he omits to mention Schreiner in his discussion of women and work — and cites a speech by suffragist Carrie C. Catt in 1893 which “unequivocally contended that the primary discov-

ery of the nineteenth century, evolution, was on the side of suffrage" (41). He concludes his article with a survey of the "few" science writers who resisted what he calls the "chorus that insisted upon women's stunted development" (47): a significant name here is Eliza Burt Gamble, whose 1894 *The Evolution of Woman: An Inquiry Into the Dogma of Her Inferiority to Man* was revised in 1916 as *The Sexes in Science and History* (see Barr 47–48).

A handful of voices cannot drown out a "chorus." Nevertheless there is sufficient pro-female polemical and scientific writing up to and around the turn of the century to indicate that feminists committed to evolution *were* able to resist or discount the misogyny of Darwinism. Moreover, on craniometry, in addition to Gardener, Barr could also have instanced Alice Lee, an early woman graduate (BSc and BA) of Bedford College for Women at London University, who as part of her DSc thesis at University College, London, applied statistical techniques to measurements of skull capacity and showed this to be unrelated to the intellectual achievements of men — by implication, of women as well (Love, "Alice in Eugenics-Land" 147–52). Another significant figure is the American sociologist Lester Ward, with his "gynaecocentric" theory of evolution, of whose work both Gilman and Swiney were aware (see Love, "Darwinism and Feminism," 123, and Swiney, *Awakening* notes to 25, 39, 45, 46).¹² Besides, feminist women generally surely had reason to espouse the idea that gender relations might as yet be in an early stage of evolution.¹³ Unlike the Victorian gentleman scientist, who notoriously could not but see himself as the apogee of the evolutionary process, women had reason to *welcome* that "[c]ontinuing natural and social change in the future" which was one of the more uncomfortable implications of Darwin's theory.¹⁴

Possibly such a feminist response was limited to Young's "intelligentsia." But I suggest that the definition of "intelligentsia" here should be wide rather than restrictive, implying many more women than students of science like Antoinette Blackwell or exceptional intellectuals like Gilman and Schreiner. Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally* (1911), a popular feminist novel of no intellectual pretensions at all, is one text that incorporates evolution and religion in a typical feminist rhetoric. Colmore makes a character refer to the suffragists as "evolution's instruments" (164), and at a climactic moment in the plot has a suffragist heroine, after being forcefed in jail, forgive her persecutors in a moment of religious vision in which her sufferings are seen as analogous to those of Christ on the cross. The narrator then comments about the doctor in charge of the forcefeeding: "he knew not, this man, that he was raised; knew not that by the forgiveness of the woman, whom, as a working woman, he despised, he was brought a little nearer to the glory that waits, far onward on the upward path of evolution, for every living soul" (278–79). Such a feminist amalgam of "upward paths," although achieved in a metaphorical moment rather than by argument, deserves attention — especially as the redemptive forgiveness of a modern "working woman" is here deftly substituted for the forgiveness of Christ. Surely a new and radical eschatology, simultaneously feminist, Darwinist, and Christian, is being slipped into place by Colmore.¹⁵

Another distinctively feminist reconciliation of scientific/evolutionary and Christian world views is demonstrated by Frances Swiney, who seems to have made herself an advocate of this position in Britain. In *The Awakening of Women, or Woman's Part in Evolution* (1899), which went into three editions and was translated into Dutch, Swiney made an explicit and conscious reconciliation of religious and evolutionary histories, citing

a battery of “scientific” authorities as she did so. Her aim was to position women as the natural superiors of men:

In the old world story of man’s origin, how beautifully does this scientific theory of the higher evolution of woman find its justification and divine verification! . . . Into her loving care was confided the future of the human race. . . . Love, therefore, was to be the mainspring of her actions

God is love. . . . [A]nd therefore was woman to be the human embodiment of that love which compassed the universe, and is the ultimate goal of all creation in the cosmic plan.

It is a matter of little moment, if science discovers the first woman in the first human mother crooning over her babe in the dim shades of primeval forests, and from the instincts of the animal, traces the development of maternal love; the sublime truth underlies both records of the origin of the human race. (43–44)

Note how Swiney here displaces the new Adam or Christ, substituting the figure of woman as the “ultimate goal of all creation.” Hers is a feminist theory of purposeful — even sacred — evolution. Such feminist evolutionism seems to have attracted little attention from subsequent historians of science, though.¹⁶ Where Darwinism and women have been written about, evolutionary theory is more often seen in its aspect of misogyny: its liberating possibilities have been harder to recover.

Thus my view of a feminist fin-de-siècle drawing strength from a fundamentally reconciliatory rhetoric conflating the claims of Darwinism and religious belief is at odds with another theory about the effects of Darwinism: that the new apparently objective, scientific basis for the doctrines of sex difference and female inferiority contributed to the defeat of “first wave” feminism. A recent argument of this type is presented by Fiona Erskine, who reviews the ideas of a number of women who resisted the new orthodoxy, including Frances Powers Cobbe, Olive Schreiner, Eliza Burt Gamble, and Mona Caird, but concludes: “Despite such examples of women who found in religion or in freethought, or in an unusually heightened feminist consciousness, the means to resist the social prescriptions of the evolutionists, for most this was not possible” (113–14). Erskine appears to share Young’s conviction that independent assimilations of Darwin’s ideas were an unusual achievement: the stumbling block for women, in Erskine’s view, was the doctrine of difference and associated separate-sphere ideology.

A different view from Erskine’s, however, was put forward in Marie Tedesco’s 1984 article on Antoinette Blackwell. Tedesco points out that evolutionary ideas offered advantages to feminists by allowing them “to champion a scientifically based female superiority” while not abandoning the effort to maintain other “separate but equal” goals (64). In my view, Tedesco’s position is supported by the way feminist rhetoric assimilates evolutionary and religious ideas into its political arguments and by the way authors like Swiney and Gamble did indeed use ideas of innate gender difference to argue the superiority of women. Readers of such materials in the first decade of the century were possibly accepting Darwinism on far other than oppressive terms. After all, Alan Barr, although doubtless correct in concluding that the “evidence of evolution . . . tended to be invoked much more frequently by what we would see as the repressive or illiberal parties” (41), does also acknowledge that continuing scientific pronouncements in this area were provoked by a diverse and apparently unstoppable “Hydra-like” women’s movement (26). In

short, the situation was complicated, and arriving at personal reconciliations of Darwinism to religious faith evidently occupied many decades of varied individual experience. A warning from Sally Kohlstedt and Mark Jorgensen seems apt in closing this discussion: “We can provide no simple or linear way to characterize the arguments of those who chose to modify, extend, or react to the arguments given authority by Charles Darwin” (3–4, and see notes 11 and 12).¹⁷

I TURN NOW TO THE PLACE OF THIS WRITING in literary history. The polemical extravagance of the feminist millennium has not as yet received an appreciative commentary: indeed, the opposite has rather been the case. Jane Lewis, editor of the 1987 anthology *Before the Vote Was Won*, found nothing distinctive in the pieces she had collected, remarking in her introduction that the “style and even the tone” of the early suffragists “was more often than not very similar to that of their male opponents” (2). “The conviction of these early feminists that they had to ‘prove’ themselves made their writings often stern and unbending” (5), says Lewis, who apparently felt she had to apologize in advance for the dullness of her book. On the other hand, Elaine Showalter in 1977 found the “cosmically grandiose” sense of mission of women writers in the 1880s and 1890s laughable: she pokes fun at Mary Haweis (whom she suddenly calls *Mrs* Haweis) for “domestic imagery” like the following:

In women’s hands — in women writers’ hands — lies the regeneration of the world. Let us go on with our tongues of fire, consecrated to an entire holy work, cleansing, repairing, beautifying as we go, the page of the world’s history which lies before us now. (Qtd. in Showalter 183)¹⁸

Yet this assumption of the apostolic role (see Acts 2.3) for women writers by Haweis is more interesting, and more radical, than Showalter’s ridicule implies. Nor, of course, is Haweis’s cleansing necessarily “domestic” — a late Victorian reader surely would rather have conceived of this image as civic or public.

I hope other readers will not find the afflatus of late nineteenth-century feminists dull and may even *like* “cosmically grandiose,” as I do. The male literary icons of the nineties and the pre-war period seem to me to offer nothing quite comparable to these visionary and blasphemous women.¹⁹ Recent interest in this period by feminist literary historians and critics should in my view extend to polemical writing as well as poetry and fiction. My own attempt to revalue this feminist polemic, however, returns from controversy to fiction. The second part of my essay is a reading of the incomplete, posthumously published *From Man to Man*.²⁰

ALTHOUGH OLIVE SCHREINER WAS A FREETHINKER, her last novel is especially rich in Biblical reference.²¹ Schreiner, like her feminist contemporaries, often revises Biblical images with subversive intentions. She differs from the polemicists, though, because as one who had abandoned Christian belief and practice, she lacks the fundamentally reconciliatory or synthesizing impulse so noticeable in an author like Swiney. Her intention is rather, in my view, to replace Bible story with women’s stories as a signal that the time has come for change: women’s history must be rewritten, and this history, Schreiner’s rhetoric insists, has as great a mythic significance as scripture. Another thing that sets Schreiner’s

novel apart from contemporary feminist rhetoric is that *From Man to Man*, at least in the unfinished form known to us, does not include any millennial vision of a redeemed world. *From Man to Man*, as I will explain, rather offers itself to the reader as a story of beginnings; it is both a new pseudo-Darwinian *Origins* and a new pseudo-Biblical “Genesis.” As a feminist Schreiner thought of her audience as female,²² and her book undoubtedly attempts the history of the origins of gender relations in human society. Presenting her material to the world in a novel, the woman’s genre *par excellence*, though, Schreiner had somehow to accommodate feminist argument, scripture, and science to the conventions of fiction. The result is a mixed book which can prove a stumbling-block to Schreiner enthusiasts.²³ But seen in context, as a late-Victorian feminist synthesis of Darwinist and Biblical origin stories, it begins to repay careful reading.

To deal with the question of scientific, especially evolutionary, reference first, it will come as no surprise to readers of *The Story of an African Farm* that *From Man to Man* is set in an evolved world. As Berkman remarks: “The entire novel teems with names of familiar and exotic plants and animals and with analogies among plant, animal, and human life” (*Healing Imagination* 76). Schreiner shows the mineral substratum, topography and climate, vegetation, animals from the highest to the lowest, and the human races and tribes to be a continuum determined by natural laws — up to and including the mental life of the major characters. That this view of the human mind was the most radical implication of evolution is noted by Young: “many saw that the exclusion of all non-material causes from nature did not merely eliminate miracles from Genesis. It threatened the status of mind and will and the hope for a moral meaning to life outside of life itself” (21). When Rebekah’s meditations on the new view of the universe include the remark that “between the life that moved in the creature that ploughed in the mud of the lake-shores three million years ago and the life which beats in my brain and moves in my eyes here in the sunshine today, I can see long unbroken lines of connection” (180–81), Schreiner is making her radical position clear. Moreover, Schreiner’s heroine Rebekah is an observer of this continuum, throughout her life educating herself in botany, biology, natural history, and human history. Compared to *The Story of an African Farm*, then, which deals with precisely that threat to “mind and will and hope” described by Young, *From Man to Man* ignores loss of religious faith but instead situates the human being as one whose task is to observe and understand an evolved world — the human as scientist, in short.

This world view accompanies a narrative which exemplifies evolution. In *From Man to Man* the fit survive and the weak do not.²⁴ The harsh lesson is introduced as early as the Prelude to the novel, where of Rebekah’s twin baby sisters only one survives. The pattern of the novel as a whole is the same. Rebekah proves to be equipped to survive life’s struggle: her younger sister Bertie does not.

Other aspects of the novel, however, show Schreiner’s critical responses to contemporary Darwinism.²⁵ It is noticeable, for instance, that of Schreiner’s sister-heroines the sister who appears to exemplify the “womanly” characteristics most dear to biological determinists — Bertie is more beautiful, more maternal, more loving, more domestic, more passive, and less intellectual than Rebekah — is shown to be the least fitted to survive. A related point is the mere fact of “variability” in the sisters. The novel turns on the difference between Bertie and Rebekah, difference between two sisters having long been a common strategy for novelists who wanted to criticize conventional assumptions about the nature of “woman” as single entity. Female difference, while always controversial, had

become even more controversial in terms of late nineteenth-century Darwinism, for Darwinists tended to agree that men showed more variation — for instance, in intelligence — than women. Schreiner's two sisters therefore engage very clearly with this debate.²⁶

Evolution does not affect this novel only in Rebekah's self-education or in over-arching narrative patterns, however. The evolved world is also suggested powerfully by scientific imagery. An example relating to the question of difference between women which also nicely illustrates Schreiner's method occurs early in the lives of the two heroines, after Rebekah has been for some time married to Frank, absent from the family farm (and the narrative), and living in Cape Town. John-Ferdinand, Frank's younger brother, is now staying at the family farm and courting Bertie. Rebekah, revisiting her old home, takes him out to walk on the farm and warns him how vulnerable Bertie is by using a comparison of two species of tree, the mimosa and the aloe.²⁷ Rebekah is the mimosa which, even if its main trunk is felled, survives and puts forth a stunted growth. Bertie is the more vulnerable aloe (121–22).

Rebekah's analogy — probably only a second-time reader will feel its full impact — is full of meaning. It reveals that her own unhappy marriage has partly destroyed her. It is also a prefiguration — like the death of Bertie's twin — of Bertie's fate. But the symbol is then extended. Rebekah cuts with her penknife "a large many-horned gall growth from one of the mimosa branches," telling John-Ferdinand that she wants to find out "whether the galls on the different species of mimosa are all quite alike, or whether they are different on different species of the tree" (123). This submerged metaphor suggests that men may be "many-horned galls" that live parasitic lives off women. Unconsciously, Rebekah is asking herself whether John-Ferdinand necessarily resembles his brother Frank, her own constantly unfaithful husband, or whether men vary (possibly only in their selecting different kinds or "species" of women to prey upon). Rebekah's action is therefore a frightening moment for the reader: it simultaneously reveals the depths of Rebekah's desolation in her marriage, expresses considerable contempt for men, and threatens male sexual behaviour with scrutiny by knife-wielding women scientists. Like other powerful feminist images in the book, this one is heavily encoded. Such images are crucial to the total effect of the book.²⁸ Through them, both the practice of science by women and the implications of a scientific view of gender relations as evolved in history are brought to bear on the conventional narrative — the courtships of two sisters — that the book appears to offer.²⁹

Turning from science to religion, while religious faith may not be debated in this novel, reworked and encoded Biblical narratives and symbols are certainly essential to its effect. This is a topic with a rather mixed critical history, and I tend to agree with Berkman's remark that "twentieth-century scholars generally subordinate, if not sidestep, the religious dimensions of [Schreiner's] life and writing" (*Healing Imagination* 44). In this area it appears to me that feminist readers have been especially remiss. There has been dissatisfaction with the book³⁰ which stems, in my view, partly from failure to recognize the scope and radicalism of Schreiner's "rewriting" of scripture. Yet the possibility that *From Man to Man* is also a critical rewriting — or replacement — of Bible story is one which has been recognized, consciously or unconsciously, by many readers.³¹ Schreiner herself signposted her text with references, as in Frank's remark that "it's not the Garden of Eden yet!" (84) or the narrator's reference to "the great Chaldean curse" (86). John-Ferdinand also carries a copy of Milton in his pocket. Readers are therefore certainly

given notice to ponder the book's relationship to Genesis.³² In terms of narrative, however, it has been difficult for critics to recognize what appears to be the conventional, even melodramatic, story of two sisters as a new Genesis. It has been hard to explain why there must be two Eves in Schreiner's African garden. And why does the book so strongly mark out the different paths through life of the two sisters?

The explanation, I believe, is found in Schreiner's reading of W. E. Lecky's *History of European Morals* in 1879. In this book Lecky became notorious for arguing that the social institution of prostitution was the necessary condition of the existence of marriage. The foundations of his argument were these assertions:

concupiscence, or the sensual passion, was "the original sin" of human nature; and . . . the natural force of this appetite [is] far greater than the well-being of man requires. (281–82)

Lecky's version of the "fall" is followed by citation of Malthus's arguments that even "normal and temperate exercise" of the sexual appetite within marriage would result in calamitous overpopulation. "[H]owever much moralists may enforce the obligation of extra-marital purity, this obligation has never been even approximately regarded," says Lecky. (Frank, Rebekah's persistently unfaithful husband, is made by Schreiner an illustration of this fact.) And as, to Lecky, the "family is the centre and the archetype of the State" (282), it follows that the prostitute,

Herself the supreme type of vice, . . . is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her, the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted. (282–83)³³

From Man to Man therefore presents a story of origins, a new Genesis, by exemplifying Lecky's historically necessary "fall" of woman in Bertie's story. Bertie, her future shrinking steadily to nil, is seduced and abandoned, excluded from marriage, shut out of ordinary society, exiled from South Africa. "[P]assed from man to man as a degraded sexual object of exchange," in Cherry Clayton's phrase (70), Bertie becomes a kept woman and then a prostitute, that focus-figure of Victorian moral and feminist concern. Clearly her death would have occurred at the end of the book if Schreiner had ever written it, for Schreiner's opposition to this sexual system included not just a symbolic equation of Bertie's persecution with her destruction but practical understanding of the damaging effects of such a life. And on the other side of Lecky's coin, Rebekah, the virtuous wife of a promiscuous husband, lives out Schreiner's critique of the system described by Lecky by privately ending her marriage. She sets up careful boundaries demarcating a life under her own control, there claiming for herself economic independence, a free hand in raising her children, and even, in radical defiance of contemporary sexual mores and beliefs about race, freedom to adopt her husband's illegitimate half-African daughter.

The story of these sisters then is Schreiner's way of presenting a theory of how gender relations are created, or re-created, in every generation, although the author's alignment with Bertie and Rebekah indicates that these relations are morally indefensible and already historically outmoded. Dense reference to Genesis and significant reworking of Genesis material signal that this is the story of beginnings. *From Man to Man* even has two beginnings, like Genesis,³⁴ and as in Genesis, each beginning evokes a differently created world. Schreiner's Prelude, subtitled "The Child's Day," is a moving and strange opening

to the book: the excellent illustration it offers for my argument about beginnings, as well as for my general position on scientific and religious reference in the novel, requires spending some time on it here.

THE PRELUDE COMMENCES WITH A CHILDBIRTH in a woman-oriented world where the past — Gerald Monsman is surely correct in finding a Genesis reference in the first sentence (137) — touches the present and where dividing lines between nature and culture are blurred and permeable:

The little mother lay in the agony of child-birth. Outside all was still but the buzzing of the bees, some of which now and then found their way in to the half darkened room. (33)

The ruling authority over Rebekah on this day is a woman, a Dutch-speaking African servant, and Rebekah's "fall" on this day is a positive or upwards one, a moment of intellectual and emotional growth and discovery.

The second beginning, significantly entitled "*The Book: The Woman's Day*" (emphasis added), is introduced by a familiarly novelish narrative voice, distanced, retrospective, male-oriented, geographically precise. The farm it describes is born from the "ribs" of the earth, a variation of Genesis' creative sequence:

Tucked away among the ribs of a mountain in the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope is a quiet, tree-covered farm. The owner of this farm twenty-five years ago was an Englishman. (77)

Nature is here controlled: by history, farm, and colonizing English farmer. The "fall" of Bertie in this narrative is caused by an (English) man, is sexual, and is permanently damaging.

Each beginning should therefore be read as not simply a beginning of this book, but rather an account of beginning itself. Thus, in the child Rebekah's "day," phylogeny replicates ontogeny: through her play Rebekah reproduces human social history by building a house, taming the animals, tilling the soil, above all bearing, nursing, and educating the child. On this "day" Rebekah, as well as fantasizing the birth of an infant, discovers the body of her still-born baby sister and begins to "mother" it, providing it with food and toys deliberately chosen to suggest all of natural and human history: "a dried monkey's skin and a large alphabet book . . . a round Bushman stone with a hole in the middle . . . a fossilised leaf," needles and thread, and a "head of Queen Victoria, cut out of the tinsel label of a sardine tin" (39–40). Monsman suggests that the house for mice which Rebekah has built (but which no mouse has come to live in) represents "the bankruptcy of the nineteenth-century symbol, emptied of its metaphysical plenitude" (139), and he also emphasizes that "Rebekah's appropriation of the dead baby . . . twists maternity into an illusory process and invests the dead infant with . . . misplaced yearning to concretize the ideal" (144). I do not want to underestimate the disconcerting — even macabre — underside of these scenes. But I find Schreiner's symbols replete with meaning rather than emptied of it. Schreiner is proclaiming the creative power of women, whose contributions to the invention and reproduction of culture (transmitted as it is from wo/man to wo/man) are represented by these symbols and also by Rebekah's desire, and evident potential, to

take part in the adult work they suggest.³⁵ And in fact Rebekah, as new Eve, makes two important intellectual discoveries on this day. She is equipping herself not just to survive and to mother, but to transmit and extend human culture.

Rebekah's first discovery relates to her childish attempts to understand the birth and origins of a human being. Grasping "vaguely, but quite certainly — something of what birth and death mean" (64), Rebekah attains to a new knowledge which includes, in fact, that controversial topic of contemporary feminist public debate, sex education for girls: "She would never again look for a new little baby, or expect to find it anywhere; vaguely but quite certainly something of its genesis had flashed on her" (64).

Her other major discovery relates to the serpent, the intruder in the garden or snake in the grass, seen by Rebekah. A yellow cobra that should (by the code of adults) be killed, it is allowed by Rebekah to slide away unharmed. Genesis is certainly being retold here as a naturalist's view of creation replaces a Biblical one: the reader already knows that Rebekah has many fantasies of a life continuous with the life of companion animals (for instance, her mouse house) although this cannot be taken to mean, especially in a South African world, that nature is therefore benign. On the contrary, Rebekah's observation of a battle between a big ant and a little ant (just before she sees the snake) is an allegory in little of the evolutionary lesson, the survival of the stronger. In Schreiner's retelling, however, Rebekah recognizes her own affinity with the snake, indicating that one story of origins has displaced another: human and animal are continuous in Rebekah's world. In the father's garden of prohibitions (girls must not climb trees, girls must not get dirty, girls must not touch father's microscope) there is a sense of guilt which Rebekah feels the snake has been made to share. But such ideas are being replaced in Rebekah's child-mind by another mode of thought, the scientific mode, seen in her outward-looking, careful, imaginative observations, her desire for her own garden and books and microscope, her willingness to let the snake go unpunished. In later life, Rebekah's marriage will be attributed to her "hunger" for knowledge, sexual and intellectual: the woman scientist is the new Eve (86).

In "The Prelude: The Child's Day," Biblical reference and evolutionary and scientific reference therefore work much like each other — both are continuous, dense, and developed by returns to major symbols. Both levels of reference also often, of course, coincide, for each is a commentary on the other. The difference remains that Darwinism is subjected to open and reasoned critique by Schreiner via the older Rebekah, whereas Biblical myth is subjected to something more like radical subversion from within by the author.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of millennialism, it is Schreiner's rewriting of scripture — and especially the level of scriptural reference in Schreiner's veiled or coded metaphors — which now require examination. Schreiner often echoes the polemicists. The tree of life, for instance, is an image persistently associated with Rebekah — it is seen in the pear tree in her childhood garden, in her scientific mimosa/aloe and gall metaphors, in her epiphanic vision in chapter 8, and in her reflections on evolution. The garden is an equally important presence in the book, taking many guises. The flood myth, however, as it is a less obvious Genesis image with a powerful resonance in the novel, is selected for discussion here. Its first appearance is after Bertie at sixteen is seduced and abandoned by her English tutor, for the tutor's departure is followed by a description of a "flood" on a day "two months after [the tutor] went away" (101); this is also the day of Bertie's recovery from the stricken state into which she has been thrown by her desertion:

. . . in all the hollows in the hard ground were pools of water, and you could hear the stream still rushing in the bed of the mountain torrent.

Baby-Bertie leaned her head back against the door; a rich, fragrant odour rose from the fresh earth; she drew the white shawl she had thrown over her head closer round her face, and sat watching the wet world. The sun was setting at the end of the great valley below the farmhouse; all the west was a bloody pall of crimson, all the east a faint reflection of its redness. (102)

To me the passage can only suggest that Bertie has missed a period, feared to find herself pregnant, but then with the return of menstruation is released back into innocence: her white shawl represents the veil of a virgin bride. “After she had got into bed it seemed as though a great hand made an arch over her and she crept in under it and was safe” (103). After the flood, the bow in the clouds: it appears that woman’s goddess, Nature, has the power to cleanse and renew the spoilt woman.

Schreiner’s relocation of the Genesis story in a natural scientist’s South Africa enables the Bible to be reborn in the humble and even unmentionable details of a woman’s life. The intention in evoking the flood is clearly feminist and critical: as implied by this symbol of a new covenant, women did not — and do not — “fall” once and for ever into a state of sexual uncleanness: history has not already been written, the future may always be redeemed.³⁶ “Was there not something that might make the past as if it never had been?” (102) asks Schreiner’s narrator.³⁷ But while Schreiner retrieves the past by making old stories new, Bertie’s experience is the opposite of what her creator is attempting: she is unable to rewrite her “past” or story. Handed on from gossiping wo/man to wo/man, the news of Bertie’s “fall” destroys her, revealing hypocritical sexual conventions to be the real serpent in the human garden (201).

Schreiner’s chapter title, following the evocation of the flood, is “The Dam Wall” — a title which suggests some interesting readings. The title of chapter 7, “Raindrops in the Avenue,” where Bertie (now staying with Rebekah in Cape Town) goes out dancing with her brother-in-law Frank while Rebekah secludes herself in her study, also warns the alert reader that the flood myth will be revisited. In fact it initially becomes the subject to Rebekah’s scholarly contemplation, for Rebekah is querying the functions of genocides, those periodic extinctions which punctuate the history of evolution. As Rebekah asks herself, “is it not practically our duty and for the benefit of humanity that we should forcibly suppress, cut off and destroy the less developed individuals and races, leaving only the highly developed to survive?” (195). The argument has particular force in its South African context. But Rebekah’s resistance to this eugenicist idea raises for her a query which white South Africa unfortunately forgot: which *is* the superior race? (See Figure 12). “[W]hat if to me [asks Rebekah] the little Bushman woman, who cannot count up to five . . . [sacrifices her own life to save her tribe] . . . What if I see in that little untaught savage the root out of which ultimately the noblest blossom of the human tree shall draw its strength?” (197).³⁸

Situating an “untaught savage” woman at the top of a future biblical/Darwinian tree of life³⁹ enables Rebekah to displace a central doctrine of evolutionary theory, for in this woman Rebekah sees exemplified not the “destruction of the weaker by the stronger” (209) but rather the loving self-sacrifice of one so that others shall live. In a wonderful instance of synthesizing feminist discourse, Rebekah’s internal argument arrives at a meta-

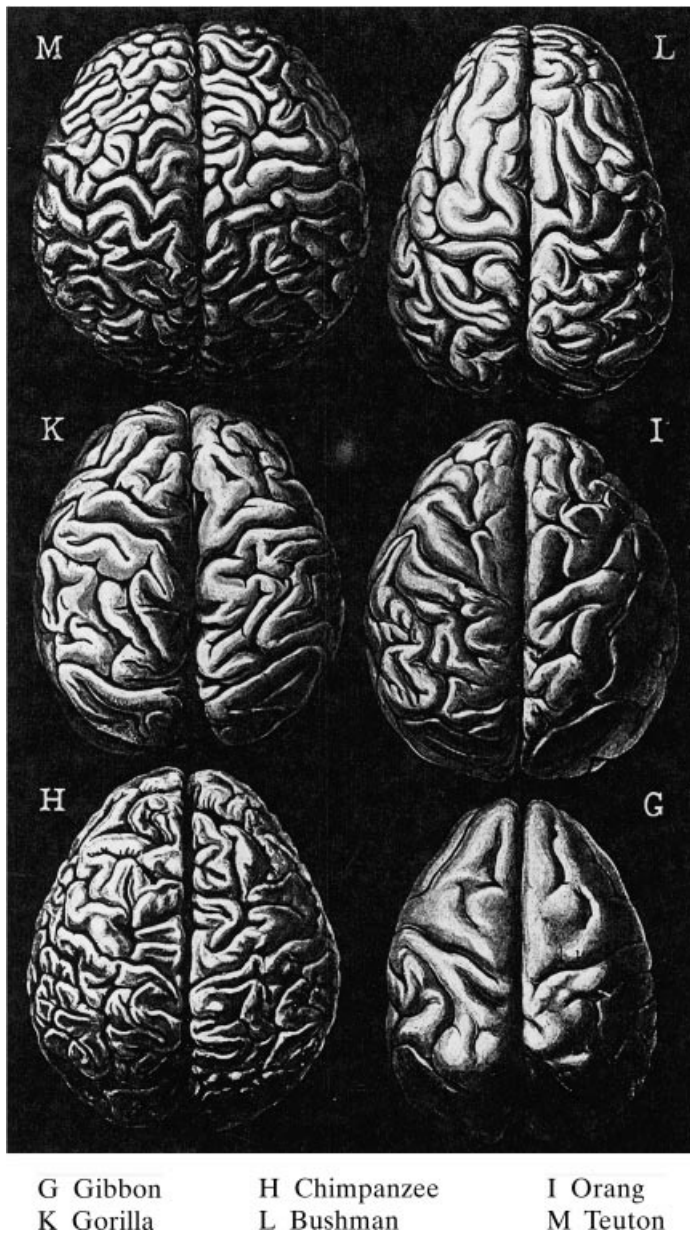


Figure 12. “Brains of Six Primates.” Drawing, from Ernst Haeckel, *The Evolution of Man: A Popular Scientific Study*, trans. Joseph McCabe (London: Watts & Co., 1905): between 668–69.

phor for this, to her the highest, form of life: “love becomes incarnate in the female mammal feeding her young from her breast — this is my blood which I give for the life of the world -” (209–10). As feminist religious critic, Rebekah displaces the singular centrality of the sacrificed body of Christ by a diffuse female image of mother-love. As evolutionary critic, Rebekah simultaneously claims that selfless love is as yet the highest achievement of the evolutionary process.⁴⁰ In Schreiner’s new *Origins*, the human mother’s discovery of altruistic self-sacrifice displaces brute struggle or male cunning as evolution’s most powerful instrument. It distressed Elaine Showalter that Rebekah’s later life should be confined and deprived by the demands of motherhood.⁴¹ But in my view, it is an essential image of Schreiner’s feminist theory of evolution that Rebekah be seen pursuing her rational, meditative, and investigative mental life (to many, the supreme evolutionary product) in the midst of — possibly even because of — her practical mothering.

Meanwhile Bertie, ostracised at the ball, comes home alone and falls asleep on the bed in her rain-damped dress. Bertie’s flood image, very private, and very different from Rebekah’s, is a rising sea of “billowy waves” which she dreams of as whirling out from the white train of a ball gown. This “sea of misty white” suffocates a whole circus audience of Bertie’s acquaintances who have apparently gathered together to scorn her: the dream is both self-punishment, for Bertie is among the drowned, and revenge, for the dancer is clearly also Bertie (236–37). Her dream recalls the flood which disposed of all humankind except Noah, *and* it recalls the rising of the Red Sea: Bertie, snubbed and exposed at her dance where the tale of her “fall” from sexual grace has been gossiped about, in dream engulfs both herself and the ungodly armies of Egypt.⁴²

It is essential to recognize here Schreiner’s extension and intermeshing of metaphors. Bertie’s dream stems from a real incident at the dance when she withdrew to fix her torn white ball gown (“The white gauze which covered the silk skirt tore from the waist to the bottom” 233) and so overheard her own story being retold. But also recalled to the reader is the moment when Bertie revealed her past to John-Ferdinand, and John-Ferdinand rejected her for her “sin.” As Bertie ran away from him, her white muslin dress was torn “from top to bottom” on a branch of mimosa (136). Bertie’s dream, then, like Rebekah’s ratiocinations, presents a very attractive — and highly irreverent — domestication and feminization of the big symbols. Loss of virginity (memorialized by the torn dress) is equated with the rending of the veil in the temple (Mark 15.38): the conventional white dress of female purity takes on a vengeful power equivalent to God’s wrathful flood. And the symbolic complex is, once again, replete with ironic and critical implications: one of these, of course, being the inadvertent implication of the original mimosa tree Rebekah, the virtuous wife, in the destruction of Bertie.

Biblical readings of the novel continue to be invited as it progresses. Bertie spends miserable years as an exiled slave in London: her master/owner is a Jew. Rebekah labors in her vineyard. Within the space of a single essay, these further developments cannot be explored. But I hope my reading, incomplete as it must be, will at least explain my conviction that there are many reasons why a modern feminist should admire this book. Schreiner’s method, on the grand scale, mirrors features of contemporary feminist polemical writing: its scientific and religious reference; its feminist rewriting of scripture. The more critical attention paid to these levels of the text, the more coherence of purpose is revealed in Schreiner’s narrative, the more transparent her symbols become, and the more connections are apparent between Schreiner’s narrative and her apparently non-narrative

divagations. *From Man to Man* relocates and rewrites Bible myth in a book which is also thoroughly and persistently about evolution and about views commonly held by evolutionists on the relations and status of the two sexes: it is not only the “book something like the Bible” that the young Rebekah wanted to write (53) but in many ways the “sex paper” that Schreiner described to Havelock Ellis in 1887: an “attempt to apply the theory of evolution to elucidate sex problems” (Cronwright-Schreiner 113).

As already indicated, in one way Schreiner appears to be out of step with her feminist contemporaries. Their millennial visions of a world renewed and restored by reforms in gender relations are missing from this incomplete novel, although in a letter of 1886 to Karl Pearson, Schreiner had included precisely such a vision in a projected ending for her book where Rebekah

paints before [the dying Bertie] the woman’s dream of the future, the freedom, the joy, the strength that are to be. . . . [T]he time when men and women so shall use their sexual natures and the power they have over each other that they shall be the source of life and strength; when love shall be no more bound down to material conditions; but shall be what it is striving to be now, the union of mind, the foundation of the entire nature. (Rive 92–93)

It is impossible now to say why this scene remained unwritten. Perhaps Schreiner’s later revision of her manuscript never caught up with her earlier intention to move her narrative along from Genesis to Revelation. I also wonder whether Schreiner’s acceptance of the mechanistic and deterministic implications of evolution was more complete than that of many contemporaries. In contrast to the rhetoric I quoted earlier, *From Man to Man* presents a world outside religious belief, and promises of progressive or “social” evolution are hardly a major theme of the book. It is unfortunate that the chronological relationship between *From Man to Man* and Schreiner’s allegorical *Dreams* of 1890, which do indeed signal the birth of a new age for women, cannot now be recovered.⁴⁴ Possibly Schreiner had caught the infection, by 1890, of the optimistic feminist millennial mood. However, in *Dreams*, when Schreiner does envision woman free and redeemed, it is noteworthy that the vision remains deeply embedded in time past and time to come. The tale “Three Dreams in a Desert” says that woman has lain in motionless subjection “ages and ages long” (57), and that “ten thousand times ten thousand feet” (71) will follow her attempt to cross the river to the far Land of Freedom, with no promise as to how soon a bridge of human bodies to this land will be complete: the new heaven on earth is “IN THE FUTURE” (73). Excitable feminist visions of an imminent and favorable new world therefore seem to have remained somewhat foreign to Schreiner, who was later to write in *Woman and Labour* of her dream Garden as lying “in a distant future” (282). It appears that in Schreiner’s view, evolving sexual relations to a higher level would be a long, slow business.

University of Auckland

NOTES

1. The term “feminist” is anachronistic, but no other adjective can cover the varied positions and ideas of the women quoted in this essay, all of whom were active on at least one aspect of the “Woman Question.”

2. This is a collaborative article whose authors include Walter Besant, Hall Caine, Sarah Grand, and Thomas Hardy.
3. McGibben's bibliography lacks the Swiney reference. In fact, Kent also quotes the same passage, sourcing it to Swiney's *The Bar of Isis* but omitting reference to the Temple of God (105). Late twentieth-century feminism has its own normative discourse.
4. Compare the effect when Alice James in her diary wants to be sarcastic at the expense of Fanny Osbourne (Robert Louis Stevenson's wife): "From her appearance Providence or Nature, which ever is responsible for her, designed her as an appendage to a hand organ" (Edel 93).
5. Gilbert and Gubar review some of the religious associations of feminism, especially the idea of self-sacrifice and the vision of a millennium (68–71 and notes).
6. Heywood has associated the final paragraphs of Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911) with Ursula's vision of the rainbow in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) (48). Lawrence's visionary writing and biblical reference in *The Rainbow* may be more dependent on feminist writing at the end of the previous century than has been realized.
7. The sea-squirt or ascidian was regarded as a link between the vertebrates and invertebrates.
8. Another doctor, Alice Ker, claimed of giving the wife "control of her own person" in marriage that "the proper adjustment of this one question would be the beginning of the Millennium" (*Motherhood: A Book for Every Woman*, 1891; qtd. in Kent 113).
9. McGibben remarks of Josephine Butler that "Her religious convictions were the fuel of the campaign" against the Contagious Diseases Acts (50).
10. These have been the subject of significant feminist analysis in this century: they are described at length, for example, by Russett. An earlier review of feminist scholarship on Darwin was conducted by Richards; among others, Richards cites Ruth Hubbard, who in 1979 charged Darwin with "blatant sexism" (60) (See Hubbard's "Have Only Men Evolved?" 16).
11. Barr also acknowledges the work of a "handful" of critics, mostly feminists, who commented on this relationship in the 1970s (27).
12. A variety of positions might be (and was) taken — Blackwell had egalitarian convictions, but Gamble and Swiney inverted evolutionary arguments to derive from them theories of woman's evolved superiority. See Barr on Blackwell 36–37, on Gamble 47. Swiney's arguments, wild and varied, tend to be ingenious inversions of prevalent ideas: for example, she cites authorities for the idea that the male is "undeveloped woman" (19n, 20n, 21n) and inverts Geddes and Thompson's distinction between active katabolic sperm and passive anabolic ovum to prove the exact opposite about the relative status of the sexes: "The ovum always absorbs the sperm. Anabolism implies growth, concentration, conservation, unification, cohesion, and solidarity. Katabolism, on the other hand, signifies division, dispersion, disintegration, decay and death" (*Awakening* 20). My point, I should make clear, does not depend on Swiney's intellectual respectability. However, she seems to have had no trouble in citing numerous authorities. For a description of Geddes and Thompson's "extremely influential, but now forgotten" book, *The Evolution of Sex* (1889), see Conway, (49–51).
13. In the United States, Stanton noted in *The Woman's Bible* (1895–98) that "the Darwinian theory of the gradual growth of the race from a lower to a higher type of animal life, is more hopeful and encouraging" (24) than the allegory found in the book of Genesis.
14. The phrase occurs in a 1984 essay by Rosser and Hogsett. Their subject is the way notions of perfection and the implication of a finished process slip into both Darwin's *Origin* and *Descent*.
15. A different suffragist novel, by Elizabeth Robins, was entitled *The Convert*. In it the heroine, Vida Levering, uses a Darwinist illustration: "I was only thinking about the lion's mane and the male bird's crest, and what the natural history bores say they're for" (24). Robins ensures that the novel will be read in relation to both scientific and religious claims about women.

16. In their paper presented at the “Responses to Darwin” conference in Dunedin, New Zealand, in May 1994 Kohlstedt and Jorgensen remarked that most of the standard accounts of Darwin and Darwinism “provide little discussion about gender and have few references to the women who wrote about evolutionary theory” (3–4).
17. Compare Young’s warning in 1970: “The only serious study of the reception of evolution makes it apparent that there was no coherent, easily analysable reaction to the theory and its implications.” Young is referring to Alvar Ellegård’s *Darwin and the General Reader. The Reception of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution in the British Periodical Press, 1859–1872* (1958).
18. In a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, Stetz remarks on Showalter’s “ongoing conversion to the ranks of those who take seriously the New Women writers of the 1890s,” adding “Many of us who study the period still wince at the memory of Showalter’s surly dismissal of the very same authors in her 1977 work, *A Literature of Their Own*.” (17).
19. Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, where Heaven is contemplation of “the work of helping Life in its struggle upward” (129), perhaps most closely resembles the feminist vision. The Shavian view of woman as the incarnation of life’s fecundity (Epistle Dedicatory, 13) must have been rather beside the point, however, to women concerned about social purity, access to higher education and the professions, the vote, and better paid work.
20. I follow Showalter (182, 201–04) and other commentators in assigning *From Man to Man* to the fin-de-siècle. In fact, as the book was first drafted in the 1870s in South Africa, thoroughly worked over in the subsequent decades, yet not published until 1926 after Schreiner’s death, it is a difficult book to date. One important part of the book, “The Prelude: The Child’s Day,” was written well on, in 1888. Yet the book was never finished (see Ravilious).
21. Schreiner’s childhood crisis of faith is described and discussed by her biographers, First and Scott, *Olive Schreiner* 51–57. Yet Schreiner told her friend Karl Pearson in 1886 that the dream of her life had been to write a life of Jesus (First and Scott 52n). Rebekah records in the Prelude of *From Man to Man* her somewhat similar ambition at five years old: to one day write a “book something like the Bible” (53). Schreiner’s project in *From Man to Man* should be associated with a comparable project in the United States, Stanton’s *The New Woman’s Bible* (1895–98).
22. Schreiner made statements about her book like: “some woman whose heart is lonely will be comforted by what I write” (diary, 7 Dec. 1887); “I think it’s the most womanly book that ever was written” (letter, 2 Feb. 1889); “I know it gives a voice to that which exists in the hearts of many women and some men” (letter, 25 Feb. 1907); “I feel that if only one lonely and struggling woman read it and found strength and comfort from it one would not feel one had lived quite in vain” (letter, Mar. 1913) (qtd. by Cronwright-Schreiner. 19–29).
23. See Friedmann: “If this brief account of [*From Man to Man*] gives the reader the impression that this is a poor novel, that impression is not far off the truth. . . . Those of us who admire Olive Schreiner should not pretend that her geese were swans” (14 and n.1).
24. Gray remarks that Schreiner “echoes John Stuart Mill” but “enacts Darwin” (147).
25. There is a good brief account of Schreiner’s ideas about evolution, including discussion of *From Man to Man*, in Berkman’s *Olive Schreiner: Feminism on the Frontier*. In *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner: Beyond South African Colonialism*, she discusses Schreiner’s religious, scientific, and social ideas at more length; in particular, she describes Schreiner’s resistance to the theories usually called “Social Darwinism.” My essay takes up other aspects of evolutionary theory than those already covered by Berkman.
26. In *Sexual Science* Russett describes how Darwin in *The Descent of Man* considered that “Men excelled . . . preeminently in the higher intellectual faculties of abstraction, reason, and imagination. . . . Women’s ‘greater tenderness and less selfishness’ contrasted to men’s ‘ambition which passes too easily into selfishness’” (40–41). Rebekah plentifully exhibits the “higher intellectual faculties.” Russett also describes the prevalence and respectability of the

- notion of greater male variability, which derived only indirectly from Darwin but which won acceptance through the works of W. K. Brooks and, especially, Havelock Ellis (92–97).
27. Such a comparison reminds one of *Middlemarch*. The courtship of John-Ferdinand and Bertie also contains scenes where John-Ferdinand silently watches Bertie making up the dough and then walks with her in the bush, which are evocative of scenes in the courtship of Hetty Sorrel by Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede*. George Eliot, of course, often made creative use of scientific imagery.
 28. A comparable image is Rebekah's query whether a kind of moss has a male and female of the same species or if there are two different species (243). Categorization of species was of course vital to evolutionary thought: George Romanes, in an essay called "Mental Differences Between Men and Women" (1887), had claimed that men and women were so different they might reasonably be classed as separate species (cited in Love, "Darwinism and Feminism" 115).
 29. A further resonance is bestowed on the symbol if the reader is familiar with the term "parasitism" which Schreiner had described in *Woman and Labour*. See especially pp. 77–78 n. for a discussion of "sex-parasitism among the lower animals" and also p. 82 n.: "The relation of female parasitism, generally, to the peculiar phenomenon of prostitution, is fundamental."
 30. First and Scott, for instance, Schreiner's excellent biographers, find *From Man to Man* "melodramatic and derivative" and "a most unwieldy novel" in which it is a fault that "Rebekah's speeches and notes on evolution, race, and the position of women occupy a full fifth of the text" (172, 178). Showalter is also hostile, seeing the novel as both a failure and a record of failure: "Schreiner is sadly underambitious. When all is said and done, the novels are depressing and claustrophobic" (203). Gilber and Gubar remark that Schreiner "never completed her most ambitious projects," seem to share the anachronistic irritation of First and Scott that Schreiner could not get her sex life sorted out, and are, I think, quite unfair about her literary treatment of "Hottentot and Kaffir servants" (78). In offering this reading of *From Man to Man*, in fact, I seem to be in a similar position to DuPlessis who remarked re her own discussion of *The Story of an African Farm*: "In making the claim of coherence of purpose, I am in conflict with the major — virtually the only — critical response to the novel to date. Beyond its relevance to the debates of its time . . . the book has been taxed for its awkwardness" (202 n4).
 31. Schreiner's husband prefaced the novel with an "Account of the Genesis of the Book." Schreiner herself in the last pages of the book allows a character to compare the satisfaction of an artist finishing a work to "the infinite satisfaction and certitude of the dream-god of the Semitics, when he looked at his work and saw that it was good and rested" (473). Parkin-Gounelas remarks that the later stages of the novel read "like a late-Victorian feminist Genesis" (115) — in my view, an especially acute comment! A rather different critical approach is Monsman's (see below). Steele also argues that the book is a "Bible," but in the sense that it provides "moral instruction in the principles of Schreiner's humanism" (101).
 32. Monsman, whose discussion of *From Man to Man* is punctuated by chapter and verse references to Genesis, demonstrates the critical benefits of paying attention to this aspect of the novel.
 33. First and Scott (175–76) discuss another angle of Schreiner's debt to Lecky.
 34. The two narrators and two versions of the creation story in the opening of Genesis had long been recognized: "about one hundred years ago, it was discovered by Dr. Astruc, of France," says Ellen Battelle Dietrick in the *Woman's Bible* commentary (Stanton 17). I do not know how soon feminists realized that they could use this discovery to good effect.
 35. Schreiner resembles feminist contemporaries who were anxious to give women their due in the invention of culture: Gilbert and Gubar draw attention to Rosa Mayreder's *A Survey of*

- the Woman Problem* (1913), which claimed that “it is the women who are the first burden-bearers, the first tillers of the soil, the first builders and the first potters” (2: 69). There is a similar claim in *Woman and Labour*: “We hoed the earth, we reaped the grain, we shaped the dwellings, we wove the clothing, we modelled the earthen vessels” (34).
36. Studying menstruation and making efforts to redeem fallen women were a part of Schreiner’s life in the 1880s in London.
 37. Compare Swiney’s plea to “pure and noble women” whose redemption of fallen women would “show, how in the future the past can be retrieved” (*Awakening* 101).
 38. Schreiner’s reference is to promises like those in Isaiah 27.6: “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” or Isaiah 11.1 “and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”
 39. Schreiner is pointing out that evolutionary history includes the possibility that a currently disregarded and modest form of life might be the next great dominant form or, at least, its ancestor. Like her contemporaries, Schreiner thought of the human races as virtually different species, but her openmindedness compares well with some contemporary attitudes to race, which may be conveniently represented by the illustration, widely disseminated in Ernst Haeckel’s popular *The Evolution of Man*, showing the brains of various primates and human types. Here the Bushman exemplifies the lowest and the Teuton the highest level of human development. Rebekah’s query is a welcome reminder that evolutionary theory in the fin-de-siècle need not have been used to endorse imperialism and racism. That Schreiner selected female figures to carry this message is typical of the feminist writing of her age: her adaptation of Biblical metaphor to evolutionary theory should now also be recognized as representative of the feminist thought of her age.
 40. Compare Blackwell’s remark that “at the head of the scale, the human infant is more dependent on its mother than any other living thing” (28), or Swiney’s quotation from Drummond’s *The Ascent of Man*: “the goal of the whole plant and animal kingdoms seems to have been the creation of a family, which the very naturalist has had to call Mammalia” (*Awakening* 109).
 41. Showalter notes that Rebekah works out a “feminist philosophy that derives ‘life, growth and evolution’ from mother-love” (203) but does not read the major symbols of the book as in tune with such a philosophy, possibly because she had already decided that the “labors of construction and plotting were beyond” Schreiner (198).
 42. Rebekah is generally read as Schreiner’s representative in the novel (see Le Few 309). Though this is often true, Bertie presents a more extreme and secretive critique of women’s assigned destiny. Rebekah has Schreiner’s mother’s name; Bertie has one of Schreiner’s own names, Albertina.
 43. It would be especially nice to know which was written last, the terrible evocations of dismal rainy streets in London during Bertie’s years of despair but with images such as a ray of sunshine, a barrel organ, and an empty street (402–03) or the final scene of the allegory “The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed —” (*Dreams* 158–60), which features a ray of sunshine, barrel-organ music, and a busy street as symbols of hope and new life. One scene is clearly a revision of and a response to the other — but which is which?

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