

reason, their engagement did not last long, and she returned to live with her parents and then with her brothers. She read widely and began writing seriously. She started *Undine* at this time. As in the case of her later husband, Cronwright, she may have been attracted to Gau, as to other men, for his dominant personality, maturity and physicality:

It is obvious that she felt attracted to the towering and even possibly hypnotic personality of Gau, like that of Undine [to the character] Blair, and mistook the physical attraction for love ... [writing about this] "I was once partly in love when I was barely 15, and have never had the smallest return of that feeling though I have always desired it ..." (Schoeman, 236, 1989)

However, her brothers' financial situation soon deteriorated, as diamonds became increasingly difficult to find. Olive had no choice but to resume her transient lifestyle, moving between various households and towns, until she returned briefly to her parents in 1874. It was there that she had the first of the asthma attacks that would plague her for the rest of her life. Since her parents were no more financially secure than before and because of her ill-health, Olive was forced to resume working to support them.

Over the next few years, she accepted the position of governess at a number of farms, most notably the Fouchés, who provided inspiration for certain aspects of *The Story of an African Farm*, which she published under the pseudonym "Ralph Iron", as well as a small collection of stories and allegories called *Dream Life and Real Life*.

## England and Europe

However, Olive's real ambitions did not lie in the direction of writing. She had always wanted to be a doctor, but had never had enough money to pay for the training. Undaunted, she decided that she would be a nurse as that did not require her to pay anything. By 1880, she had saved enough money for an overseas trip, and she applied to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh in Scotland. In 1881, she travelled to Southampton in England. Once there, she was never to realise her dream of becoming a medical practitioner, as her ill-health prevented her from completing any form of training or studying. She was forced to concede that writing would and could be her only work in life.

Despite that, she still had a passion to heal society's ills and set out to do with her pen what she could not with pills. Her *Story of an African Farm* was acclaimed for the manner in which it tackled the issues of its day, ranging from agnosticism to the treatment of women. It was also the cause of one of her most significant and long-lasting friendships, as the renowned sexologist Havelock Ellis wrote to her about her novel. Their relationship soon developed beyond intellectual debate to a genuine source of support for Schreiner.



Olive Schreiner in 1889 at Menton, France

She finally met Ellis in 1884 when she went with him to a meeting of the Progressive Organisation, a group for freethinkers to discuss political and philosophical views. This was one of a number of radical discussion groups to which she was to belong and which brought her into contact with many important socialists of the time. Another friendship that would prove to be influential was with Edward Carpenter, the founder Socialist and gay rights activist, which, as Stephen Gray shows, remains hardly explored.<sup>[4]</sup> In addition to the Progressive Organisation, she also attended meetings of the Fellowship of the New Life and Karl Pearson's Men and Women's Club, where she was insistent on the critical importance of woman's equality and the need to consider men as well as women when looking at gender relationships.

However, her own relationships with men were anything but happy. She