

Presentation - Olive Schreiner :

Olive S was born in 1855 and died in 1920.

She was the daughter of Rebecca and Gottlob. She grew up in Africa. Her parents were colonists. All her life can be seen and understood as a struggle. First because she was deeply tormented by her childhood. Then, because she fought for her beliefs. And finally because she tried to move forward no matter the obstacles that came in her way as the lost of her daughter.

We can wonder to what extent Schreiner's work illustrates introspection?

I) A woman tormented by her past and her roots

A- A loneliness childhood surrounded by nature

S spent most of her time playing in nature, in her garden. She was talking to herself there. She was rejected by her own relatives. The time spent there, was seen as a parallel to her mother's life when she was expecting Olive. So S found peace and comfort in being outside. It is even said that she had faith in nature, so there is also a religious aspect in here. Monistic.

B - A complicated identity (illustrated by her several names)

Being rejected by her own family, she was also rejected by the society. Her own brother took the merits of her own work. She did not possess it. Her names, were given to her after her dead brothers before her. So, her name is even not her own one. Everything seem to be linked to her mother's past. She does not have her own identity.

II) The figure of a strong white independent woman // black woman // environment

A- Fights for beliefs and equal position for white women in society as men

S refused to be dependent of a man. She fought during her life to make people realize that marriage was more a way for a man to purchase a woman. The most important point that distinguished her from the other feminists of her time is that she puts into light that women were economically dependent of men, and that could not be possible if people wanted marriage to succeed. And even for the rights of women. They should have the possibility to be dependent and she illustrates this idea with the bird in a cage. Her life as a maid, when she was 20, and living among black women certainly influenced her to come to this point. She stood for the equal sexual pleasure for women and she tackles the issue of marriage and prostitution in Britain, through her novels that were successful and also in front of middle class men.

B- Which seems to be the position that a black woman had in her novels and in her childhood, so influenced by her environment

All that can be seen as influenced by her environment in which she grew up. Indeed, women who had authority and power in her novels were black women. So, in a way this is paradoxical. It would mean that she refers to herself as a black woman and that she also agree on the fact that white women were powerless. It also reveals in a way that she was educated by black women. It seems to suggest that she recognizes the fact that even if white women had more rights than african women, they could not speak. They were voiceless faced to men. She refused this situation and she speaks up for those women. Yet as it is said in a passage of her book, when a black woman yelled at the child to come back otherwise she would become as a black girl, shows that she had to be careful maybe to be balanced in her behavior in order to be respected and listened by everyone in the society, that she has to be like a white woman to be listened.

III) A quest for introspection

A - She tries to put into words what she could not say, what women would not say. // to her asthma.

All her life and her work seem to be a way for her to give voice to those who could not, even to her as she could not always probably speak with fluency because of asthma. Since her childhood, she was rejected, so she probably needed a way to figure out who she was precisely and to have her own position within the society. Her work seems to be as a journey through her thoughts and through the discovery and the understanding of her life and the society of dominations in which she lived. She needed to express herself and her thoughts, to affirm and re-affirm who she was.

B- The different travels in her life could be associated to her wish to discover more about lands, but also about herself, as she puts her life in her novels.

Indeed S as the daughter of colonists traveled during her life. She lived in Africa but also in Britain. Through nature, land, she discovers most of herself and she was already used to spend time in nature while she was young. By doing travels, she also built her way of thinking. She understood some crucial points of her society and gender relations as she was living with black women, then when she was in Britain among middle class people. She also suffered from her very soon childhood of being a girl, and not a boy. And even at the end of her life, when she was being arrested, she continued to focus on her writings and on her, she found a way to look inside of her memory to reconstruct her work (as it was burnt by British soldiers).

In conclusion, OS is a colonial female writer who had a great impact on literature and in the world. Despite the ambiguity on her position concerning feminism, we can see that she really tries to fought for change. Especially at the end of her life. It seems that her last journey to Africa, after having spent time in Britain reveals her the last part of her struggle. She did not anymore concerns only about white women but about all women, no matter their race. She also cared for black men. Through her life, she fought against different dominations, and each of them going even further in the way of thinking at that time.

Anne McClintock is a female writer talking about another great female writer. The way she wrote clearly shows that she supports OS's point of view. Even is she depicts some limits of her feminism and some contradictions of her position towards it, she illustrates her in a position of power. She even explained that she was the one who had power in her couple because she made her husband left his farm. However one limit that could be seen is that this is again a woman supporting another one, and not a male writer standing for women.