



Olive Schreiner

Ruth First, Ann Scott

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Originally published in 1980 and long out of print, this fine work illuminates Schreiner's life and major writings through a portrayal of her "conscious struggles for self-definition" as a novelist, feminist and political activist. Born in 1855 to English missionaries working in Africa, hers was a lonely, self-educated childhood. She worked as a governess during the late 1870s, and when she sailed to England for medical training in 1881, had with her the manuscripts of three novels, including *The Story of an African Farm*, her best known. She was quickly taken up by London's intellectual circles; Havelock Ellis and Eleanor Marx were among her closest friends. On her return to Africa, Schreiner supported the Boer cause and took what she herself called an "almost painfully intense interest" in empire-builder Cecil Rhodes, although she quickly became disillusioned with both. Abhorring treatment of blacks as an "engine of labour," she became an outspoken advocate for black citizenship; and her *Women and Labour* published in 1911 reflected a lifetime of thought on "the Woman Question" and became a crucial work for early-20th-century feminists. The authors write insightfully of the split sense of self in a woman who made such an impact yet felt her life a failure.

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