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Allegory and animals in Olive Schreiner's *Undine: A Queer Little Child* (1929)

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Written and abandoned in the 1870s, and published posthumously in 1929, *Undine: A Queer Little Child* has remained on the margins of Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) studies, repeatedly dismissed as a juvenile and poor antecedent to *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), or deemed valuable primarily for its autobiographical content. This article redresses these schematic readings by analysing how Schreiner draws on allegorical forms in order to explore aspects of her burgeoning radicalism. Focusing on one of the main allegorical thrusts of the novel, provided by the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic animal characters that descend from mythical, fairytale, and Ancient Greek philosophical origins, it investigates how the protagonist's metaphorically significant associations with animals relate to freethinking, feminist, and anti-imperialist ideas introduced by the novel. *Undine* thus undermines dominant nineteenth-century models of the "primitive" human or animal as less evolutionarily developed and without political platform, which can be seen to be a liberating move when the novel is read in dialogue with Jacques Derrida's lectures on animals, and with other recent work in postcolonial ecocriticism.

Keywords: Olive Schreiner; *Undine: A Queer Little Child*; postcolonial; animals; ecocriticism; Derrida; allegory

Olive Schreiner's earliest, abandoned novel, *Undine: A Queer Little Child* (1929), offers a formally experimental, albeit piecemeal, critique of imperialism, restrictive interpretations of Christianity, and normative gender roles in *fin de siècle* colonial South Africa. This is not a widespread or popular view of the novel, because, as Carolyn Burdett notes in her recent publication on Schreiner and her writings: "By any reckoning, feminist or otherwise, [it] amounts to an uncomfortable plot" (2013, 24). For Burdett and others, it is "uncomfortable" for two reasons: firstly because it does not conform to the realist novel form valued in Victorian literary culture; and secondly because it does not consistently or coherently provide evidence of the progressive views that appear in Schreiner's later fiction, such as *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) and *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only...)* (1926). Indeed, over the

course of the novel, the freethinking, feminist child, Undine, relinquishes her personal and bodily freedom, economic autonomy, and eventually her life, for love of the cruel misogynist Albert Blair. This doomed love plot is combined with other formally and politically problematic features, including racist descriptions of black African characters; the juxtaposition of an idealised England with a filthy, impoverished South Africa; strange coincidences; leaps of time and space; and unexplained character entrances and exits. These all contribute to a view of *Undine* as immature and unequal to the expression of radical arguments relating to gender, empire, and religion. Assessments of *Undine* have therefore been tentative and partial, with critics tending to see the novel as a draft version or forerunner of *The Story of An African Farm* (1883) (Colby 1970, 55-6; Cronwright-Schreiner [1924] 1973, 93, 107; Friedmann 1954, 3), as interesting primarily for its autobiographical content (Bradford 1995; First and Scott 1990, 84; Parker Lewis 2010), or as a poor imitation of “a host of nineteenth-century novels” by writers like George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant: “If these predecessors had not existed, *Undine* might be a remarkably original novel” (Monsman 1991, 38). Only recently has the novel been taken more seriously as a work of literature that both draws on, and departs from, realist narrative forms as a way of engaging with, and questioning, dominant culture at the *fin de siècle* (Burdett 2009; Munslow Ong 2014).

This article seeks to provide a sustained literary analysis of *Undine* in light of Schreiner’s politics by attending to her characteristically allegorical modes of representation. The relationship between humans and animals provides the entry-point into this discussion because, I argue, it is here that evidence of Schreiner’s developing feminist, anti-imperialist, and freethinking views can be found. The novel is read using poststructuralist and postcolonial ecocritical methodologies in order to show how Schreiner’s conception of the animal in relation to the human facilitates progressive political moves. Connections between allegory, animals, and politics are explained by Jacques Derrida, who notes, following Rousseau, that when we

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a poor imitation of “a host of nineteenth-century novels” by writers like George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Margaret Oliphant: “If these predecessors had not existed, *Undine* might be a remarkably original novel” (Monsman 1991, 38).

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talk about animals “we are still in the order of *analogy* [...] we are in the order of the figure, of the ‘like’ of metaphor or comparison, or even fable” (2009, 12), and in another lecture, posits that “the animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other” (Derrida 2008, 23). These propositions show how the animal, appearing in language as metaphor, can be used to support a hierarchized logic in which it is defined only in relation to man, and always as Other. Derrida challenges this dominant mode of representation, advocating a wholesale reform of any exclusionary cultural ranking that situates, for example, God over man, and man over child, woman, and animal, stating:

We could also invert the sense of the analogy and recognize, on the contrary, not that political man is still animal but that the animal is already political, and exhibit, as is easy to do, in many examples of what are called animal societies, the appearance of refined, complicated organizations, with hierarchical structures, attributes of authority and power, phenomena of symbolic credit, so many things that are so often attributed to and so naïvely reserved for so-called human *culture*, in opposition to *nature*. (2009, 14-15; emphasis in original).

Schreiner exploits the metaphorical significance of the animal highlighted by Derrida in ways that disrupt a rationale of inclusion/exclusion and recognise the political and ethical force instigated by the animal. She does this by hybridising human and animal in *Undine* in ways that do not tie the animal to a single representative, silent, Other. The animal appears as allegory, a word derived from the Greek *allos* (other) and *agoreuein* (to speak publicly) so that Schreiner’s anthropomorphic and zoomorphic Others have voices that might be recognised as having political and cultural significance, albeit expressed in ways that are not universally comprehensible, as implied by the idea of “other speaking”. Moreover, their “plurality”, in Derrida’s words, “cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply

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opposed to humanity” (2008, 47). Schreiner’s use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, then, is here understood within the framework of Derrida’s *animot*, which rejects binarised oppositions between humans and animals, allows the plural *animaux* to be heard in the singular *animot* to encapsulate all living things, and recognises that animals as well as humans can provoke ethical and political energy (2008, 47-48).

Connecting these semantic concepts with work by postcolonial ecocritics, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, this article analyses the representations of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic characters in *Undine* against the backdrop of “the history of human oppression of other humans [which] is replete with instances of animal metaphors and animal categorisations frequently deployed to justify exploitation and objectification, slaughter and enslavement” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 135). In a late-Victorian context where evolutionists sought to link humans to animal ancestors, literary texts began to link moral or social disintegration to the degeneration of humans back to animal-like forms, or highlight the possibility that remaining bestial qualities still existed in modern humans. ‘Primitive’ humans were made zoomorphic as a way of illustrating their difference from the evolutionarily superior humans not invested with animal-like qualities. By contrast, Schreiner’s metaphorically significant zoomorphic and anthropomorphic characters destabilize hierarchical structures of species, genders, races, and religions to redefine the traditionally negative associations of women and native people with animals. Schreiner thus unites the marginal statuses of the female protagonist, Undine, the mixed-race child, Diogenes, the monkey, Socrates, and the dog, Prince, in positive ways through allegory, as a way of challenging the oppressive orthodoxies of sex, race, and religion in colonial South Africa.

A freethinking feminist “fish out of water”

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The allegorical origins of Schreiner's novel derive from folkloric stories about undines (water-sprites or spirits), with the most likely sources of inspiration being the Greek myth of Undine, Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué's popular fairytale of the same name (1811), Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1837), and the European legend of Melusine. In nearly all of these tales, the mythical female protagonists fall in love with mortal men, transform into animals, or adopt part-animal forms, obtain souls through marriage, and, over the course of the narrative, move through the elements, from water to earth and, finally, air. Schreiner's novel alludes to these movements, though the protagonist's connection with these elements and associated animals is metaphoric rather than literal. This essay maps Undine's journey by arguing that she is initially cast as a "fish out of water", alienated from the other inhabitants of the farm because of her freethinking and feminist beliefs, whilst her friendship with her pet monkey, Socrates, reaches towards an expression of the anti-racist, anti-imperialist views Schreiner would embrace more fully in later life. Undine then becomes a "human dog" (1972, 146) as she serves her earth-bound master, Albert, and her docile behaviour is paralleled with that of Albert's pet dog, Prince. I use Derrida's work on animals and sovereignty to show how Undine's dog-like existence, and apparent conformity to Albert's instructions to exhibit correct womanly behaviour can actually be seen to challenge the distinctly human "laws" that Albert tries to impose.¹ Undine's friendship with a disabled child, Diogenes, parallels her relationship with Socrates because it enables a critique of the racist, sexist, and ableist forms of oppression that occur in the novel. Finally, I suggest that contrary to dominant readings of Undine's death as failure, her upwards-looking final scenes can be read as an allegory of freethought, and the gender ambiguity that occurs with her death supports Schreiner's drive towards equality between men and women.

Unlike her watery ancestors, Undine begins her story on land, in the semi-desert area of the Karroo, causing Gerald Monsman to describe her as "out of her element" (1991, 37).

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Undine's *true* element is revealed at various points during the novel when she identifies with water-dwelling creatures, wishing she were a duck, a fish, and a sea bird (1972, 25, 53, 216). In the first chapter of the novel it becomes apparent why these identifications are important, as Schreiner explores the radical potential of the protagonist's metaphorical status as a "fish out of water" due to her rejection of religious teachings and feminine norms. In this way, Schreiner redeploys the ichthys (from the Greek for "fish" and a secret Christian symbol when Christianity was an outsider religion under the Roman empire in the first few centuries AD) to cast Undine as an outsider from Christianity.

A freethinker from a young age, Schreiner rejected monologic interpretations of religion, and this is reflected in a scene in the novel where Undine rebels against her governess, challenging her reading of Matthew 25:

"God has prepared a heaven for the people he means to save and a hell for the people he means to burn," said Undine, very gravely, never raising her eyes from the carpet on which they rested.

There was a pause; then came the remark: "Hardly the right way of putting it, my dear. It teaches you that you should be a very good little girl, so that when you die God may take you to heaven and not send you to hell to burn forever and ever."

[...]

"I don't want to go to heaven, and, if God wants to, he can send me to hell and I will never ask him not to, *never*. I know I'm very wicked, but I'm not half so wicked or so cruel as he is. Nothing is, not even the devil. The devil is glad when we go to hell, but he did not make us on purpose to send us there, and he did not make hell, and he did not make himself, and I'm sorry for him. I believe he tries to be good and God won't let him, that's what I believe." (17-19)

Undine's radical rejection of religion and unsympathetic portrayal of the governess provide a marked contrast to the dominant representations of religious characters in colonial settings in Victorian literature, because as Patrick Brantlinger reveals in his comments on Robert Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858) and Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856), amongst others, "missionaries figure prominently in Victorian fiction, helping to improve and justify the Empire" (Brantlinger 2009, 22). In Schreiner's novel, Undine directly challenges the religious authority of the governess, taking against the notion of predestination advocated by certain Protestant doctrines, because in Undine's view, this does not allow for individual agency.² The governess cannot accept alternative interpretations of the Bible, causing Undine to ask herself: "what was the use of her praying – she who did not love God, who could not believe" (1972, 7).

The novel's argument for multiple understandings of texts and cultures is enforced by the intertextual presence of older allegorical forms, and, as I have noted elsewhere, these forms are connected with rebellion (Munslow Ong 2014, 710). In this way, the governess's monologic reading of the Bible stands in contrast to the various references to fables and fairytales, so that when Undine is sent to her room as punishment, she considers the books on her shelf:

Arabian Nights whose old torn pages seemed to emit an odour of myrrh and roses caught from the gardens of Bagdad – Hans Andersen's beautiful song in prose about the mermaid and the young prince – but these and others were of course not to be looked at. (1972, 20)

As a child, Undine feels guilty for reading *The Little Mermaid* instead of the Bible on a Sunday (20-21); however, as an adult she decides to stop attending revival meetings and curls "herself up at one end of the great parlour sofa with Wolf's fairy tales" and "enjoyed them as much as I had done when I was eight years old" (43). These two scenes therefore act as smaller

allegories to reveal how the form is associated with a challenge to dominant culture, whether this challenge is embraced or not.

Schreiner's use of metaphor and allegory in *Undine* is particularly focused on her presentations of animals and zoomorphic humans to promote anti-imperialist and freethinking views. These political positions are deliberately intertwined in recognition of the importance of the role that the "civilizing mission" of the spread of Christianity played in the colonisation of Africa; and because, as Leela Gandhi (2006, 67-114) has persuasively argued using the examples of Gandhi, Annie Besant, and others, animal rights movements often combined with anti-colonialist arguments during the *fin de siècle*. Although both Schreiner and *Undine* reject Christianity, the conception of freethinking outlined in the novel is not devoid of a sense of spiritualism. Indeed Ruth Knechtel identifies in her discussion of *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), *From Man to Man* (1926), and "A Dream of Wild Bees" (1890) that Schreiner strives "towards an animist ideal of human, animal, plant and spiritual connectedness" (2010, 259) as part of her commitment to social unity and equality. In *Undine*, Schreiner articulates her opposition to Christian monotheism and monologic understanding of religious texts by showing her desire to move away from the logic of "one civilization, one path of progress, one true religion" enforced by imperialists in Africa (Brantlinger 1990, 173), though she remains invested in the concept of a soul. *Undine* therefore uses this term to oppose her brother Frank's suggestion that she dominates or owns her pet monkey Socrates:

"When we sit together of an evening, I can feel he is thinking just what I am, and when I talk to him he understands me. That is what I hate [...] people don't know anything about it, and they say he hasn't got a soul. How do *they* know, I should like to know?" (1972, 24; emphasis in original)

Just like Fouqué's *Undine*, who is viewed by her husband, Huldbrand, as inferior because she does not have a soul, Schreiner's *Undine* argues that the oppression of animals on the basis of

the Christian argument that they do not have souls is not justified. Undine feels that Socrates is invested with a life force that she can understand in these terms, and she has a spiritual affinity with the monkey that enables her to communicate with him. For Undine, this “soul” does not enable Socrates’ entry into a Christian heaven, rather it is used to assert the animistic view that soul and body cannot exist separately, and so all natural life should be treated equally.

For the other members of the colonial household, the chained monkey provides evidence of human domination, and their ownership of him supports the principles of domestication. Huggan and Tiffin elucidate further on the role of animals in the colonies:

The first was to provide food and labour, but the second was to provide a model of civilised living for the indigenous population. The domestication of animals – the discipline required by animal husbandry – was seen to exert civilising (Christianising) influences on the native populations. (2010, 9)

For the inhabitants of the colonial homestead, Socrates does not stand in for “food” or “labour”, but for “a model of civilised living”. Schreiner exposes this signification throughout the novel by displaying Undine’s sympathy for animals as a way of critiquing the speciesism that supports the domestication of wild creatures. The treatment of native life in South Africa at the hands of the colonizers is allegorized when Frank “pelts” bread at the ducks, and throws mud at Socrates’ nose (1972, 23-4). When Undine challenges Frank and tries to explain that she has a relationship with Socrates, Frank tells her that he only likes “the bread and butter you bring him”, thereby interpreting the act of feeding as a symbol for ownership and domination that asserts the superiority of humans over animals (24).

The allegorical significance of Undine’s zoomorphism and Socrates’ anthropomorphism is revealed as radical in the scene where they play outside with Undine’s bonnet. Undine’s mother chastises her by drawing on the anthropocentric, sexist, and racist tenets of her culture:

“Do you wish to ruin your complexion completely, you wicked child, that you sit here staring up into the sky as if you had never seen it before and were bereft of all your senses? Get your kappie from that ape and come into the house at once”. (14)

This moment is identified by Anne McClintock as “the ungodly sign of racial and gender transgression” (1995, 276), as Undine’s religious unorthodoxy and her anti-racist and feminist positions are united. Undine simultaneously contravenes feminine norms by not wearing a bonnet, racial norms by darkening her complexion, and religious norms by not reading the Bible indoors on a Sunday.

Later the same day, Undine and Socrates rebel against the restrictions placed upon them, as Socrates steals Undine’s bonnet and climbs on to the roof of the farmhouse, where he becomes “busily occupied in pulling out thatch and working away with the greatest dispatch and precision” (1972, 28-9). This attempt to destroy the homestead highlights its imposition on the landscape, and in turn, the imposition of imperial rule of South Africa. Undine follows Socrates on to the roof, where they are discovered by the other inhabitants of the house:

Consequently the appalling and shocking spectacle which met the eyes of the upper powers, on their return home, was Undine, shoeless, kappieless and torn, seated on the ridge and holding on with one arm to the gable, while at the other end Socrates, with clanking chain and tail in the air, was dancing a true devil’s quadrille. Never were worthy parents and instructors, on their return from a quiet Sabbath ramble, met by so horrific and wrath-rousing a sight. (30)

Undine’s decision to climb is viewed as an upheaval of feminine respectability delivered in religious terms by her mother, who asks: “If you continue this course of action, what will become of your immortal soul? What will become of it?” (31). Like Socrates, and in line with the undine myths, Undine’s soul is called into question by the other members of the household. As Socrates escapes the chain imprisoning him, and Undine follows, the child and the monkey

are no longer aligned to principles of domestication and religious education. Undine's metaphorical zoomorphism, which causes her to climb up towards the sky, and Socrates' metaphorical anthropomorphism which allies him to colonized peoples, instead enable them to assert feminist, anti-racist, and freethinking positions. Although this short allegory about female and animal freedom is brought to a close through suffering (Undine is punished and sent to bed), Undine has nevertheless demonstrated the potential women have for agency in choosing to join Socrates on the roof. By uniting anti-imperialism with feminism through transgression of feminine norms, Undine's actions mount a challenge to the strictures of colonial life in South Africa. Undine's punishment therefore shows an awareness of what those seeking change must overcome, whilst her dramatic actions suggest potential for change.

Metaphorical relations: humans and dogs

Schreiner's attempt to articulate her burgeoning feminist, freethinking, and anti-imperialist positions through the allegorical "beastly" natures of her characters allows her to position them as future leaders (or sovereigns) who hope to change existing laws. By investing Socrates and Prince with human qualities, and the child, Diogenes, with canine qualities, Schreiner interrogates the Victorian notion of "dog and apes" as "top animal[s]" (Ritvo 1987, 35) that are impassably divided from the human. This enables her to explore the possibility that zoomorphic humans may be better equipped to move beyond the limits of their culture than the anthropocentric humans who believe in their own superiority. In doing so, Schreiner exploits the metaphorical connection made by Derrida that "in the place of the beast one can put, in the same hierarchy, the slave, the woman, the child" (2009, 33), by linking Diogenes, Undine, and Prince. However, despite their perceived gendered, racial, and animal inferiority in the context of colonial South Africa, they are shown to be more ethical and progressive than the other characters in the novel.

The hierarchical relationship between Albert and Prince is an allegory for the unequal and oppressive forms of power at work in all of the social structures in the novel. Harriet Ritvo's assessment of the Victorian man's relationship with his dog is that "it epitomized the appropriate relationship between masters and subordinates" and "as an inferior should know its station, so a superior should forthrightly exercise control. People that had not yet domesticated the dog might not be fully human; the extent of canine servitude was an index of the advance of civilisation" (1987, 20). Albert appears to subscribe to this view, positioning himself as master, and his attempts to control Prince identify him as anthropocentric and an upholder of colonial values. He addresses Prince but offers no opportunity for reciprocation, as Undine finds out: "Presently she heard voices, but did not look up until she found herself close to Albert Blair. There was no one with him but his dog, so she concluded he must have been speaking to it" (1972, 126). For Albert, Prince's inability to use human language means that his 'silence' is interpreted as tacit agreement; and in his dealings with both Prince and members of his family, Albert seeks to govern, rather than communicate, with others. For example, after both his brother, Harry, and father, George, propose to Undine and are refused, Albert decides to "indulge a fancy" (130) by pursuing her himself. This plot to undermine his male relations shows his intent to create the world around him, as a god or sovereign. Again, Albert informs Prince of his plans to marry Undine: "How should you like a certain little eccentricity for a mistress, Prince? [...] Ha, ha! How wrathful the poor boy would be, and the old one too, for I think *he* had his thoughts of her" (130). This choice to speak to a creature with whom Albert is unable and unwilling to engage in meaningful exchange is revealing because, as Derrida notes in his reading of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651):

If one cannot make a convention with beast, any more than with God, it is for a reason of language. The beast does not understand our language, and God cannot respond to

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us, that is, cannot *make known* to us, and so we could not know in return if our convention is or is not *accepted* by him. (Derrida 2009, 55)

Albert's view is aligned to this Hobbesian non-responsive model of the relationships between man, God and beast, and so Albert makes his own laws about how to behave, only informing the silent parties of God or Prince of his actions, and interprets this silence as permissive. This acts as a counterpoint to the relationship between Undine and Socrates, which is aligned to Derrida's view that "it is false to say that beasts in general [...] do not understand our language, do not respond or do not enter into any convention" (2009, 55-56), because their spiritual connection allows them access to one another's thoughts in ways that facilitate communication across the species boundary.

Albert determines his masculinized sovereignty through the obedience of women as well as of animals. During a discussion, Undine observes "how absolutely that dog obeys you", to which Albert replies: "I make most things which belong to me do that" (1972, 127). Albert extends his control to include Undine, and the laws he imposes are great in scope and number. He tells her that, as a woman, she should "shun all extremes in manners and modes of expression; she should have no strong views on any question, especially when they differ from those of her surroundings; she should not be too reserved in her manners, and still less too affable and undignified"; that "if a woman cares to retain the affection of those about her, she will always be particular as to her dress"; and also that Undine must "go to church tomorrow" (137-8, 148, 147). Albert attempts to force Undine to obey the implicit laws of colonial life, adhering to the required norms in religion, sex, and race.

The connection between Undine and Prince is made explicit when Albert thinks that if he were to marry Undine, then "men must envy him his wife, as they did his dogs and his horses" (141-2). This metaphorical substitution is complete in Albert's eyes in the scene where "the dog rubbed his head against his master's foot; the human dog crept nearer to him" (146).

Albert's belief in his own superiority over the dog and the "human dog", Undine, demonstrates the anthropocentric and Eurocentric logic of colonisation with which he is associated, because as Huggan and Tiffin note, control over animals operates as a marker of advanced civilisation.

They go on to explicate this view in the broader context of gender and empire, arguing that

the closer a people to the natural world, the further from civilisation and closer to brutishness – at least to Europeans – they appeared. Such associations have also determined women's inferiority to men, since women have been thought closer to nature, particularly through such bodily activities as childbirth and child rearing, and consequently less concerned than their male counterparts with the activities of the mind.

(2010, 157-8)

Albert therefore casts himself as the god or king who rules over the animal and animal-like woman, and by viewing Prince and Undine in exactly the same light, Albert's imperialist sexism and speciesism are united. These metaphors of control and domination in relation to animals are more fully explained by Marjorie Spiegel, who likens the language used to describe "good" slaves in 19th century literature to the language used for loyal and obedient pet dogs; whilst freed slaves were depicted as "beasts" and "mad dogs" (1996, 34-8). Spiegel goes on to write that

we need only to turn the metaphor on its head to see how animals are affected. When obedient and subservient, an animal is a loyal companion, a "good slave". When independent, an animal becomes suddenly transformed in our eyes into an uncontrollable beast. (38)

Albert's view of Prince and Undine is the same, and it echoes the moment when Undine and Socrates are viewed as beastly when they move beyond the control of the other members of the household. Albert discards Undine as he would his dog, telling her: "I believe I care for that dog as well as for most things; but if he became disobedient or vicious, I should care nothing

more about him”; and when he breaks off his engagement to Undine, “he felt no sorrow for the young life he had crushed. It had to be done, and he did it – as he beat his dog or discharged his servant when necessary” (1972, 148, 160).

The anthropocentric view in which Albert casts himself as god, sovereign, or law-maker, stationed above woman and animal, causes him to interpret Undine’s zoomorphism in a negative way. However, Schreiner’s utilisation of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism in the novel does not serve to reinforce imperialistic reasoning, as Albert’s logic of superiority is not maintained. Derrida’s vision of the relationships between the sovereign and beast helps to show why this is the case, as he explains that “there is between sovereign, criminal, and beast a sort of obscure and fascinating complicity, or even a worrying mutual attraction, a worrying familiarity, an *unheimlich*, uncanny reciprocal haunting” (Derrida 2009, 17). As all of these figures “have in common their being-outside-the-law” (17) the simplistic hierarchical structure that Albert attempts to impose is circumvented. Thus although Albert tries to distance himself from Prince, forcing him to be submissive, their “reciprocal haunting” means that, despite his efforts, Albert’s relationship with the dog does not maintain and support the logic of master-servant / human-animal relationships. Schreiner enforces this idea by choosing the names “Prince” and “Albert”, the title and first name of the husband of the ruling Queen Victoria, as a way of suggesting a shared sovereignty that uncannily parallels their positions as outside of, and makers of, the law.

Albert’s failure to maintain a hierarchy of God, sovereign, and beast is contrasted with Undine’s successful, metaphorically significant, zoomorphic associations. Whilst Albert expects both Undine and Prince to abide by his rules, their animal or animal-like statuses enable them to stay outside of his laws. Again it is useful to turn to Derrida here, as he writes:

What remains to be thought of this metonymic contiguity between the beast and God, the beast, the sovereign and God, the human and political figure of the sovereign being

right there, *between* the beast and God, the beast and God becoming in all senses of this word the *subjects* of the sovereign, the sovereign subject of the sovereign, the one who commands the human sovereign, and the subject subjected to the sovereign. These three figures replace each other, substitute for each other, standing in for each other, the one keeping watch as a lieutenant or stand-in [*suppléant*] for the other along this metonymic chain. (2009, 54)

Derrida conflates metonymy and metaphor here, describing a metonymic process of connection, which creates meaning through contiguity or context, using the metaphorical principle of “replacement” or “substitution”, which creates meaning through similarity. Whilst Derrida does this to displace any stable notion of the sign, arguing that terms endlessly replace one another, Schreiner’s preference for metaphoric forms over metonymic forms leads to a different approach. This can be seen in the relationship between Undine and Albert, as Albert “leave[s] Prince to keep you company” (1972, 133), for the dog to keep “watch as a lieutenant” and act as a reminder of Undine’s duties to her “sovereign” (Albert), and God (by going to church). Albert intends Undine to associate Prince metonymically with his instructions to abide by gender and religious norms. Undine however, does not connect Prince contiguously with her duty to Albert, but enacts a dual substitution, telling Prince “I wish I were you!” and over the next two weeks

Prince stayed with her always. She had thought never to love another animal again when Socrates died; but our hearts are often larger than our wills, and the great curly dog had grown to be almost what the brown-eyed monkey had been to her in other days. (134)

Instead of making a metonymic association between Prince and her duties to Albert and God, Undine seeks to replace the dog metaphorically with herself and/or Socrates. By allowing Prince to stand in for Socrates, the dog also comes to stand for rebellion, spirituality not

associated with doctrines of the Church, and a way of living outside of social laws and norms. Thus Prince, Socrates, and Undine invoke the power of being “outside the law” due to their animal or zoomorphic natures, and therefore are able to undermine the various oppressive colonial and societal structures at work. Whilst at the level of plot, Undine’s desire to be like the dog can be read as desire to relinquish all intellectual agency for love of Albert; at the level of form, her metaphorical zoomorphism suggests a kind of escape from human laws. As a dog, Undine is able to return to a more natural, and therefore progressively ethical way of life, a point that is echoed later in the novel with the introduction of Prince’s twinned character, Diogenes, who exemplifies this more fully.

When Undine arrives in New Rush (now Kimberley), she befriends, and names, a twelve-year old disabled girl, Diogenes, after Diogenes of Sinope, a key founder of Cynic philosophy who adopted ascetic and often shocking ways of meeting his most basic human needs. He condemned civilisation for its rejection of natural living, showing indifference or hostility towards civilised customs. His advocacy of cannibalism, for example, showed disregard for the privileging of human life over other forms, and it showed how he chose not to be bound by law or civic duty. In *Undine*, the name Diogenes connects the child to both the monkey and Prince as Diogenes was a disciple of Socrates, and an anti-conventional thinker who “rejoiced in the nickname of dog which he was given for his rejection of civilised living” (Sorabji 1993, 160). Although not explicitly stated, descriptions of the girl Diogenes indicate the possibility that she has a mixed racial background (304-5). This, combined with her metaphorical zoomorphism, is used to reveal the extreme difficulties facing women, children, disabled, and/or non-European people in the Diamond Fields in the 19th century. Like the animals exiled by human communication, Diogenes is ignored by the inhabitants of New Rush, as she is unable to work in the interests of the colonising powers. As Diogenes cannot take part in the patterns of economic life instigated by the discovery of diamonds in New Rush, she is

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treated like a stray dog, unloved and unwanted. Her dog-like status therefore works to allegorize various linked forms of prejudice, including racism, sexism, and discrimination against disabled people. These important connections can be contextualised by turning to the work of Clare Barker, who suggests that disabled children operate in postcolonial literatures as “the most vulnerable recipients and poignant symbols of colonial ‘damage’”, thereby “provid[ing] postcolonial writers with the opportunity to imaginatively reconstitute movements for national independence or cultural sovereignty in ways that promote interdependent relationships at the baseline of ‘healthy’ communities” (2011, 189). In Barker’s formulation, “healthy” refers to “an alternative politics of care” that “maintain[s] a commitment to the accommodation, validation and – perhaps eventually – the real celebration of difference as a valuable aspect of a nation’s diversity” (189). This is applicable to *Undine* because Schreiner’s nascent tendencies towards anti-colonial resistance are conveyed through the child Diogenes’ unique corporeality that allegorically expresses a collective struggle and drive for survival. Diogenes is identified in the novel as a progressive character, as rather than digging in the earth with tools to find diamonds, she cultivates it, growing a bright red rose that she gives to Undine. In doing so, Diogenes creates something that does not feed into the exploitative practice of mining raw materials from the colonies for Western economic benefit, and instead uses it to express unity with others across boundaries of race, class, age, and ability.

Conclusion

Echoing the narrative structures of the myth of Melusine and *The Little Mermaid*, which see the heroines transition from water to earth to air, either by growing wings and escaping, or by turning into foam and ascending to heaven, Schreiner’s Undine seeks to end her journey by merging with the sky. Unlike her brother Frank, and her alter-ego, the fallen woman, Alice Brown, Undine does not return to water via death by drowning. For this reason, Frank and

Alice can be seen to be permanently contained by their culture, unable to progress. By contrast, Undine's recurrent associations with birds and feathers throughout the novel (25, 157, 216) foreshadow her final assimilation with the sky at her death, which signifies her ability to transcend the limitations imposed on her on earth. Following her night-time vigil over Albert's dead body, Undine crawls out of the tent, where "She looked up at the old stars that she had looked up to and loved from her childhood" (369). One of the stars begins to talk to her, telling her "I am only your brother [...] without death there is no change, without change no life" (371-2). In this context, Undine's death might not be read simply as a failure to live as a feminist and freethinker in colonial South Africa. Instead, by remaining attuned to Schreiner's allegorical modes of representation, Undine's ability to see above and beyond the limits of colonial life means that her death paves the way for future change. Over the course of the novel, Undine defies the conventions of colonial life by rejecting Christianity, is excluded from social activities with the church, and cannot find a partner who will accept her freethinking feminism. Further, her spiritual connection to the natural world through water and air, and her metaphorical association with Melusine and the water-nymphs who have fish or serpent tails, refutes compulsory female submissiveness by challenging conventional notions of gender. This is reflected in the penultimate line of the novel, which describes the shadow of a man lying next to Undine's dead body: "Her white kappie lay near her and cast a grotesque shadow, like a man's face with lose nose and chin; and the light glistened on her soft brown hair" (374). As Undine's metaphorical serpent- or fish-tail inherited from her literary sisters is suggestive of a both-sexed body, it appears that Schreiner was attempting to undermine both compulsory sexual dimorphism, and the limiting gendered constructions based on that dimorphism, in order to enforce an argument about equality of the sexes.³

By creating a zoomorphic protagonist able to see beyond her own historical and cultural moment, Schreiner challenges the suggestion that European man is superior to other forms of

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JMO: sorted!

life. The zoomorphic human characters and anthropomorphic animal characters who defer signification enable Schreiner to make links between discussions of race, gender, religion, and imperialism. In doing so, Schreiner reverses the traditional exploitative metaphorical representations of animals and animal-like people in 19th-century literature. As Undine transitions from earth to air like her supernatural and mythical literary ancestors, and Prince embodies his regal name, Schreiner's metaphorically significant characters begin to make new "laws" about ways of living. In defying the hierarchical logic of animal under human, wives under husbands, colonies under colonizers, black under white, and all under God by blurring the boundaries between these categories and occasionally reversing them altogether, *Undine* shows evidence of Schreiner's reach towards a more radical politics.

Notes

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¹ This interpretation of “law” is informed by Derrida, who argues that “every *law* is not necessarily ethical, juridical, or political. So it is the concept of *law*, and with it that of contract, authority, credit, and therefore many, many others that will be at the heart of our reflections” (2009, 16). “Law”, then, is deliberately broad, so that it does not simply apply to jurisprudence, but more widely to social laws, customs, and norms, particularly those related to gender and religion, and this conception is bolstered by Jacques Lacan’s theory that a subject comes into being through recognising paternal law and suppressing pleasures associated with the maternal body. Lacan argues that there is a relationship between the figure of the father and entry into the Symbolic (structures of language), stating: “it is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the Symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified this person with the figure of the law”. This resonates with both God the Father in Christianity, as well as pointing to gender implications in which women are emblems of the ongoing circulation of “paternal law” (Lacan 1981, 41; see also Lacan 1985).

² Given that Schreiner’s German father converted from Lutheran to Wesleyan, and her English mother was the daughter of a minister who changed from Wesleyan to Calvinist, it is not clear which form of Protestantism Schreiner is referring to. However, at the risk of over-simplifying, predestination (in very different forms) appears in Calvinist and Wesleyan doctrines to refer to the notion that God is omnipotent and therefore has foreknowledge about the people who will enter heaven after death. “Predestination and Election” also appear in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (1562). Undine’s argument, then, is that God is cruel because she cannot change her destiny, regardless of her acts on earth.

³ Schreiner's later writings on the New Man, New Woman, and female-to-male gender transitioning outlined in her polemical study, *Woman and Labour* (1911) and her novel, *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only...)* (1926), support this point.