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Socialism, Suffering, and Religious Mystery: Margaret Harkness and Olive Schreiner

In 1888, in *To-Day*, Margaret Harkness published an allegory, ‘The Gospel of Getting On’, which suggested that socialists were the only true nineteenth-century Christians. She dedicated the allegory to Olive Schreiner, the South African author famous for *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), whom she had met during the 1880s in London. Harkness encountered Schreiner’s writing within a wider context of a society that was revisiting and reassessing conventional religious practice, and at various points in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Harkness publicly expresses admiration for the social ideas explored in Schreiner’s writing. This chapter traces a shared philosophy of religious re-visioning that, I argue, encouraged Harkness to re-examine her own positions on Christianity and socialism, and prompted her to undertake experiments with form and genre. In order to demonstrate the effect of this religious re-visioning more precisely, I provide a reading of Harkness’s novel *In Darkest London* (1891), which shows her engaged in her own reformulations of Christian religion.

I

Scholarship on Harkness has tended to concentrate on her involvement in the 1880s socialist movement, especially in the Matchwomen’s Strike of 1888 and the Dockworkers’ Strike of 1889 (Hapgood, 2000:135–6; Koven, 2004: 167). Recent work to more fully recover Harkness’s journalism has significantly positioned her among socialist-activist and non-fiction

writers such as Clementina Black and W. T. Stead (Koven, 2004: 153–168).<sup>1</sup> The religious aspects of Harkness's novels have been less examined, with scholars either taking her word that she did not belong to any faith (Law, 1891), or associating her with the faiths of the Salvation Army and Christian Socialism (Koven, 2004: 167; Sypher, 1993: 115). Although Harkness grew up as the daughter of an Anglican clergyman, she cut all ties with her family when she moved to London, and it can be assumed that she rejected her family's religion at the same time (Webb, 1883: 79). However, though her cousin Beatrice Webb (née Potter) wrote that Harkness had no religion in 1889, she reported chatting about both 'human and divine' subjects in 1885 (Webb, 1885:139; 1889: 279). As I will argue, it is her struggle with socialism and orthodox Christian faiths that leads to Harkness's particular religious reformulations and utopian visions of the future.

Schreiner's work has been studied for its utopian philosophies of feminism, socialism, and pacifism (Burdett, 2001; Heilmann, 2004). Recent scholars have drawn attention to the significance of her engagement with London's intellectual groups such as the Fellowship of the New Life - an idealist group of socialist artists who stressed collectivism and men and women's fellowship in opposition to the individualism, personalism, and egoism of capitalism - and Karl Pearson's radical discussion group the Men and Women's Club, which debated Pearson's beliefs in evolution and essential sexual difference between men and women (Livesey, 2007: 44–68; Walkowitz, 1992: 135–165). Schreiner's religious faith has most often been characterised as agnostic. Like Harkness, she also rejected the orthodox religion of her father, in this case a German Methodist missionary to South Africa. Burdett has argued that Schreiner found an alternative to the faith of her upbringing in the ideas of evolutionary connectedness and progress expressed in Herbert Spencer's *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy* (1862), and the similar 'romantic conception of natural harmony' of Emerson (Burdett 27–28). A number of scholars have identified aspects of Emersonian

transcendentalism in Schreiner's writings (Jay, in Schreiner, 2003: xix; Kissack and Titlestad, 2006: 33).

Though the 1880s was a time of agnosticism in the face of Comtean positivism and scientific advances (deVries, 2010: 190), it should be remembered that agnosticism was not synonymous with - nor did it logically progress to - atheism. Agnostics were often also adherents of 'freethought', which, in the 1880s and 1890s contained its own faith that, in the future, metaphysical questions would be solved, doubts resolved, and 'ultimate Truth' revealed (Berkman, 1989: 51-2). A state of hopeful agnosticism could be sustained by Spencer's popular concept in *First Principles*, the 'Unknowable'. Even scientific writing at this time could emphasise what was still unknown or unknowable, and so preserve a space of mystery that could be filled by religious faith (Fyfe, 2004: 3). Agnosticism could often lead to unorthodox reformulations of Christian theology as agnostics struggled to reform their old religion so that it could be reconciled with new experiences and beliefs.

The socialist thinking with which Schreiner and Harkness engaged not diametrically opposed to Christian religion. Christian Socialists, followed by the Anglican Church, championed a conception of Christ the worker, focusing on his Incarnation, and humanity - rather than his sacrifice and suffering, which had been stressed in Atonement theology (Hapgood, 1995: 187-90; Ross, 2007: 20-21). The Salvation Army too, though it originally stressed Atonement teachings, moved towards a focus on the Incarnation and on material ministering to the poor (Yeo, 1977: 13). However, as Hapgood argues, this materialist move by Christian groups left a spiritual void that socialist groups and writers moved to fill with visions of utopias. For example, the Fellowship of the New Life invoked ideas of millenarianism, predicting that the new life would be a heaven on earth, coming about as part of the redemption of the Second Coming, when all classes and genders would be reconciled (Livesey, 2007: 45; Yeo, 1977: 8-23).

In this discursive context, readers could interpret Schreiner's writings as producing unorthodox, yet still religious, and even at heart Christian, utopias. Scholars have noted that her collection of allegories, *Dreams* (1890), was received by suffragettes as a comforting expression of feminist spirituality (deVries, 2010: 198; Heilmann, 2004: 129–130). Margaret Harkness was even more likely in the late 1880s to have received Schreiner's writings as a reformulation of religion, as she was struggling with disappointments and searching for ways of making sense of the world. The turn of the decade was a time of disillusionment for socialist artists (Livesey, 2007: 72; Hapgood, 2000: 133–42), and especially for women. The Dockworkers' Strike had failed to bring about revolutions of class or gender, as unions accepted more pragmatic gains. The personal experiments of the time also foundered; Pearson's Men and Women's Club did not achieve its ambitious aim to treat men and women equally, and Schreiner and many other women members left the club with regret (Walkowitz, 1992: 149–59). By the end of the century Amy Levy and Eleanor Marx had both committed suicide, providing evidence of what Deborah Epstein Nord sees the tenuousness of independent women's lives in these days (1990: 737). The 1880s vision of a new life - a heaven on earth, where classes and genders would be reconciled - by the 1890s had become clouded. In response, Harkness turned to Schreiner's writings, and found there a feminist reformulation of Christianity, to which she responded by attempting to emulate Schreiner's art and create her own unorthodox Christian utopian visions.

## II

Harkness not only admired Schreiner, but she believed that they were workers in a shared mission. As a journalist she wrote articles about Schreiner, in which she positioned herself as working closely with Schreiner in a shared artistic project. Although their personal relationship appears to have been difficult at times, Schreiner did admire some of Harkness's work and

granted that they were fellow workers for the cause of class and gender equality. In 1888, in a letter to Beatrice Potter, she praised Harkness's socialist novel, *A City Girl* (1887), and in 1891 she wrote to W. T. Stead that Margaret Harkness was 'a woman who will yet do great & good work for the working classes with her pen' (T120 (M722): W. T. Stead Papers/12, 15 March 1891). She also wrote directly to Harkness: 'I would rather you wrote one great generous article in a newspaper showing how large & impersonal the soul of woman be, than thousands of conversations with me. [...] I believe you will yet do greater & greater good work in our world' (T120 (M722): W. T. Stead Papers/4, January 1891). The correspondence between Schreiner and Harkness, as well as Harkness's own journalism during this period, indicate that she drew inspiration from Schreiner's work as she experimented with form and genre to express her ideas in her own writing.

Though Harkness's 1890 *Pall Mall Gazette* article is titled "Salvation" v. Socialism: In praise of General Booth', it could easily have been titled 'In praise of Olive Schreiner'. In this article, Harkness expresses her disappointment with socialism: 'My Socialistic dream was vanishing ... the great strike has come and gone, and we are very little nearer the great social millennium' (Law 1890b: 1–2). One better solution to social ills, she suggests, is the Salvation Army. However, she also advances a second, more radical, solution for social reform: a gospel of love, for which she quotes Olive Schreiner:

A letter from Olive Schreiner lies before me while I write this, in which she says, 'If the world is ever to be saved, it will be saved by love, and by nothing else.' I believe she is right. I believe that love will one day grow strong, even in the slums of our great cities, and that then THIS world will be heaven. (1–2)

Harkness summarises Schreiner's philosophy in a way that implies they are consciously developing this religious social vision together. However, she is already transforming

Schreiner's meaning by turning Schreiner's ambiguous, hypothetical language - 'if this world is ever to be saved' (my emphasis) - into a more concrete prediction for the 'slums'.

Schreiner's letter is typically agnostic; she hopes for a better future for humankind, but this is a hope which is deferred, tentative, and ambiguous, based as it is in the unknown. The dedication of her first volume of allegories, *Dreams*, reads:

To a small girl-child,  
who may live to grasp  
somewhat of that which for us  
is yet sight, not touch. (Schreiner, 2003: 2)

Her vision of the future is doubly, or even permanently deferred - the girl-child of the future still might not even grasp it - so it is the hope itself, which almost takes the form of a prayer, in which Schreiner and her readers can have faith. While Harkness in her article concedes that their vision of the future is yet to come to fruition, she moves quickly on to insist with certainty that she at least knows how the new world will *not* be brought about: 'Our time is far off; and certainly it will not be brought about by setting employed against employers, preaching a class war, and persecuting blacklegs' (Law, 1890b: 1-2). Harkness's polemical journalism could not accommodate the mystery of the unknowable, and therefore could not formulate effective utopian visions.

In 1892 Harkness published an article titled 'Olive Schreiner' in the *Novel Review*, in which she provides her interpretation of Schreiner's religious position and mission:

Miss Schreiner ... is saturated with the Christian faith, although she has renounced its shibboleths ... She is a moral teacher - a prophetess. Her chief prophecy is that the reign of Love will one day begin on earth, and that men will then live together in amity, making this world a heaven [...] In politics she is an anarchist, looking forward to the

day when law shall be put aside like a worn-out garment, and love shall rule over perfect men and perfect women. (Law, 1892: 114–5)

Harkness here collapses the boundaries between religion and politics. ‘Love’ is the agent and ruler of both religious and political prophecies, and the capitalisation of the first ‘Love’ implies that, in both contexts, Harkness believes that Schreiner is referring to a Divine Love. The political vision relies on the religious prophecy: in millenarian thinking, human politics would be overturned by the establishment of heaven on earth; in Harkness’s vision, there will similarly be no need for the ‘worn-out’ garment of humanity’s laws.

Harkness aligns herself firmly with her representation of Schreiner’s beliefs. Her description of ‘looking forward to the day *when* law shall be put aside’ (my emphasis) eschews hypotheticals, suggesting that she believes that this prophesy will come to pass. The tone of the piece is highly approving, and both the religious adherent and the writer can be heard in Harkness’s question: ‘Will she ever paint anything more perfect than the picture of the man who set free the bird “Immortality”, or write a finer poem than that of the “Single Feather” which fell from heaven?’ (112).

In this question, Harkness is referring to Schreiner’s allegory of ‘The Hunter’ that first appeared in *Story of an African Farm*, and was reprinted in the collection *Dreams*. The story is ostensibly non-Christian; Burdett characterises it, as told to Waldo in *African Farm*, as ‘a parable of a positivist, or scientific world view’ (Burdett, 2001: 24). The protagonist, in a life-long quest for the illusive bird of Truth, has to exchange the consolations of a human God and immortality for the mountains of ‘Dry-facts and Realities’, and it is only in death that he attains one feather of Truth (24). However, the allegory could also be interpreted as an unorthodox Christian vision of utopia, as it depicts a tentative faith in a new world to come, one that might be enjoyed only by those who come after, and that would be won through sacrifice. Naomi Hetherington argues that by republishing the text in *Dreams*, Schreiner transforms it into an

allegory of female emancipation; just as the small girl-child may grasp the future, those who come after the Hunter may capture Truth (Hetherington, 2011: 54). In death, the Hunter's last words promise this future: "Where I lie down worn out other men will stand, young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb ... My soul hears their glad step coming," he said; "and they shall mount! They shall mount!" (Schreiner 2003:12). Schreiner's conclusion allows the Hunter's soul to outlive his worn-out body: his soul is enabled to 'hear' as he experiences a supernatural aural 'vision' of the success to come. The story of the Hunter also fits established Christian frameworks. The Hunter can be compared to Moses, who died before he could reach the Promised Land. And, as Harkness remembers, the Hunter's sacrifice is rewarded by a single feather of 'Truth' that falls from above: 'Softly it fluttered down, and dropped on to the breast of the dying man. He felt it with his hands. It was a feather. He died holding it' (12). In referring to the feather falling 'from heaven', Harkness insists on interpreting the allegory within a Christian framework.

It is likely that, before she wrote her own allegory, Harkness also read Schreiner's 'Three Dreams in a Desert', published in the *New Review* in 1887 (Jay, in Schreiner, 2003: 5, 21, 24). Told in three acts, or 'dreams', this allegory prophesies how woman's emancipation will bring about the new world of equality between the sexes, in what Ann Heilmann interprets as a Christian story of suffering and salvation (Heilmann, 2004: 131). The first two dreams focus on woman's painful emancipation; the second dream bears a strong resemblance to 'The Hunter', but this time it is explicitly Woman who must sacrifice - she must relinquish man, depicted as a biting child at her breast, in order to pioneer a way to the new world: 'Down the banks of Labour, through the water of Suffering' (Schreiner, 2003: 18-19). She is strengthened in her sacrifice by the sound of feet, the feet of the women and men who will follow, and the promise that these feet will later cross over the river (20). What remains with the reader is Woman's fortitude as she 'grasped her staff' and set off to dedicate herself to the slow process



of making a track to the edge of the river - so that one day the bodies of women like her might form a bridge over which future women will cross. Though twentieth-century scholars have been dismayed at this sacrifice of female individuality (McCracken, 1996: 237; Chrisman, 1990: 142–3), Schreiner's readers, including Harkness, would have identified it as a feminist transformation of Christ's suffering and sacrifice in the service of mankind.

The third dream presents the better future to be won by the woman's sacrifice, which is named as heaven on earth (McCracken, 1996: 237), though it is an unorthodox heaven based on gender equality and androgyny. Though Schreiner's narrator must wake from this dream, she stresses the passing of time - the next day the sun will 'arise again' - to signal a confidence that mankind is advancing, day by day, closer to this utopia (21). McCracken notes her use of the masculine for the sun 'he would arise again' as a disruption that recalls the reader to the present (237); however, it would also remind readers of the Biblical prophecy that the future would be brought about by Christ rising again, thus situating an unorthodox, feminist utopian vision within Christianity. Julie Melnyk has noted how Christ featured in women's theological writing: as suffering saviour with whom they could identify; as an embodiment of powerful and transformative Love; and as a model of feminized man and a preview of an androgynous life to come after the Apocalypse (Melnyk, 1998: xvi–xvii).<sup>2</sup>

Harkness's admiration for both the art and the message of Schreiner is apparent not only from her articles, but also from her emulation of Schreiner's style in her 1888 allegory, 'The Gospel of Getting On'. In publishing a Christian allegory in a magazine of 'scientific socialism', Harkness was implying that this branch of socialism was flawed in its lack of a spiritual mission - however, her allegory did not present much of an alternative.<sup>3</sup> Her heavy-handed effort identifies 'the false gospel of getting on', followed by Victorian capitalist society, and contrasts it unfavourably with the 'true' gospel of the Bible: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. This is the whole law and the prophets' (Law, 1888a: 83). The short story narrates

the effects of following the false gospel for the young male protagonist and the young woman who dies as a result of his desire to get on. A catechistic dialogue with ‘a voice’ - presumably God - explains the allegory’s message. Finally, the gospel itself is revealed in material form, as a grotesque written document, supernaturally taking on the blood and pain of its working-class victims (who are familiar from socialist literature): ‘The capitals were written in blood. There was the trail of a dying crofter’s finger upon it, and blots - the sweat of Irish peasants’ (84). The allegory ends with a divine judgement against this gospel and the blessing of a small group of socialists still steadfastly following the Bible’s gospel in Christ-like martyrdom: ‘they had crowns of thorns on their foreheads; and they pressed the thorns down into their flesh’ (84). Harkness suggests that Jesus’s gospel of love was still very much a painful law to follow.

Indeed, this allegory suggests another meaning to Harkness’s her choice of pseudonym, usually believed to refer to an eighteenth-century economist (Lucas, 2005).<sup>4</sup> John can also allude to John the Apostle, and the author of Revelations (in the nineteenth century these were believed to be the same person), to whom Harkness refers as the ‘Apostle of Love’ in *In Darkest London*. If the surname, Law, refers to the Biblical law of Harkness’s allegory, the pseudonym itself contains the alternative Christian theologies - a God is Love theology based on Incarnation, and that of Evangelical Atonement – which gained favour following the 1880s.

It was only in her novel, *In Darkest London*, that Harkness was able to reconcile the beliefs of her childhood Evangelicalism with Schreiner’s unorthodox feminist visions of the future. In this novel, the law of the gospel becomes less important than the gospel of love, as the voice of John Law becomes subordinated to that of the Salvation Army’s Captain Lob(v)e.

### III

*In Darkest London* first appeared as a serial called ‘Captain Lobe’ in the Christian periodical the *British Weekly* through 1888. It has been read both as a realist socialist novel, and as a

demonstration of Harkness's rejection of socialism in favour of the Salvation Army (Hapgood, 2000: 139; Sypher, 1993: 10–11). While socialism and the Salvation Army are important to this novel, Harkness presents spirituality in the slums more generally, and presents new, unorthodox Christian visions of the future. In her London, Salvation Army women, 'slum saviours', move through the streets, pubs, and dwellings of slum neighbourhoods, dispensing pamphlets and exhortations to the 'slummers', while Captain Lobe preaches at meetings and debates doctrine with agnostic socialists. The novel is to an extent a picaresque: the protagonists pass through urban scenes and interact with characters such as an 'East End Doctor', 'Factory Girls', and 'Hop Pickers'. The novel also makes space to represent the more supernatural elements of London, such as the religious prophecies of the Salvation Army, the dreams of converts, and Captain Lobe's disturbing visions of hell. In this way Harkness extends the mythological depictions of the East End that other late nineteenth-century writers (such as journalist Arthur Mee or novelists Mrs Humphrey Ward and Robert Buchanan) were producing, to create the setting for a new vision of unorthodox Christian utopia (Hapgood, 1995: 187).

The novel's plot revolves around Ruth - a factory-owning orphan, who attempts to become a slum saviour and falls in love with Lobe - and Lobe himself, who wrestles with religious doubt, the problem of the slums, and his vocation in the Salvation Army. Eventually Lobe sails for Australia, leaving Ruth in the Salvation Training Home to wait the two years before they can be married. There are two other significant characters in the novel: the 'labour mistress', Jane Hardy, who, though uneducated, makes socialist and feminist arguments; and a nameless New Woman, who is an ex-socialist agnostic, resembling Harkness in many respects.<sup>5</sup>

Harkness's novel stages a debate between socialism and Salvationism. The New Woman gives voice to this debate, rejecting both in favour of an Incarnation-based, practical

Christian charity. Her rejection of socialism is primarily a rejection of the socialists themselves, whom she complains do ‘next to nothing’ and ‘spend their time quarrelling’ (Law, 1893: 153). She also ridicules the lack of a practical programme for change: ‘we are told how bad things are for the working classes, and afterwards we are asked to go to sleep and wake up Anarchists’ (154). When Lobe asks her about the Christian Socialist movement she is vague: ‘I believe such people exist; but I do not think that they are making much progress’ (156). Yet her suggested replacement for socialism is the Christian gospel of Harkness’s 1888 allegory: ‘So far as I have seen we should not stand in need of Socialists, if the rule of “Love thy neighbour as thyself” had ever been, or could even now be put into practice’ (157).

The New Woman also rejects Salvationism, suggesting that Harkness was more ambivalent about the Salvation Army than scholars have suggested (Ross, 2007: 90). Harkness presents the early version of the Salvation Army in this novel, and its doctrine is one of Atonement evangelicalism, holding that the conversion of the poor is more important than the amelioration of their material needs (Yeo, 1977: 13). In the chapter ‘Slumdom’, Harkness’s slum saviours refuse to give to the poor, saying ‘you must give up your sins; then God will send you food’ (Law, 1893: 50). One of the starving men counters this lesson with a doctrine that evokes Incarnation ideas: ‘The Bible calls God a father, and no father would starve his son for sinning. He would give him food first, and speak about his sin afterwards ... don’t come here to talk of salvation to a man like me. I’m hungry’ (50). Though the next chapter is a continuation of ‘Slumdom’, Harkness ends this chapter here, giving the hungry sinner the last word.

The New Woman makes the argument for practical Christian charity in imitation of Christ, declaring to Lobe that ‘[i]f Christ were to walk down the Whitechapel Road this evening ... he would feed the hungry men and women’ (67). She also rejects the Salvation Army’s belief in hell as a ‘terrible doctrine’, and the belief in any sort of afterlife as an impediment to

working earnestly to change social conditions (69). It was the Salvation Army's practical Christian work in the slums of which Harkness approved (Sypher, 1993: 115), and though she portrays the slum saviours' doctrine as harsh and unchristian, she stresses their admirable ability to go among the poor, treating them, and being treated in return, with respect and kindness. One woman who had treated them badly while drunk gives them flowers as a peace offering; a man defends them in a pub, saying 'they are the only folks that come among us. They have been good to my missus' (Law, 1893: 59). The New Woman also admires the slum saviours for this, and, when she is dying, resolves to leave all her money to them, twice calling them 'our nineteenth-century heroines' (254, 256).

The New Woman's practical charity can also take the form of loving kindness, as when she comforts the freak show performer, Napoleon, who worries that because of his deformity he might not have a soul, and might be destined for reincarnation rather than heaven. The New Woman comforts him with a Schreiner-like vision of the future: 'You need not be afraid to come back again. Things are changing ... barriers are breaking down, and classes are amalgamating. By the time you come back all men will be brethren ... Love will be strong, even here in Whitechapel; and this earth will be heaven.' However, because she cannot tell him when this future will come to pass - and because she admits to Lobe that this vision of the future cannot satisfy her - she kisses Napoleon to give him comfort (71).

By the end of the novel, though, the love that Harkness and the New Woman admire in the slum saviours is not simply the human love for one's fellow man promoted by Christian Socialism, but something more supernatural. Throughout the novel, a sense of the presence of other worlds is invoked through the Salvation Army's references to heaven and hell, the New Woman's comforting speech about heaven on earth, and a number of dreams and visions. Early in the novel, Harkness dedicates almost a whole chapter to the speech of a Salvation Army convert, who describes his belief that they are living their lives 'in Salvation War' (39), and a

dream in which he ‘seemed to see’ a hypocritical nineteenth-century clergyman carried away by an evil spirit for his want of earnestness (35–6). Similarly, Lobe describes dreams in which he ‘seem[s] to see Satan carrying off [his] people’ (159).

Before her death, the New Woman also has a dream, through which she rediscovers a more traditional Christian faith. In a letter to Lobe she describes her allegory-like dream, which had been prompted by a newspaper article about an East End woman who, in despair, had smothered her baby so that it would not have to suffer life.<sup>6</sup> In the New Woman’s dream, God appears in the courtroom and arraigns those gathered there for the crime of crucifying him in the shape of the East End poor. He demands: ‘Is it nothing to you, O nineteenth-century Christians, that men starve and drink, that women in despair kill their infants?’ (255). The previously agnostic New Woman draws a mysterious lesson from this divine vision. Using Schreiner’s words again, the New Woman tells Lobe:

Heaven is no far-off country we are to inherit, but love - I mean the good within us. I believe that love will grow strong, even down in Whitechapel; but before then there will come to pass all that St John, the Apostle of Love, foresaw in the Book of Revelation ... Perhaps, after all, my God, and the God of my father, are not so very different. (256)

The New Woman here draws on the most mysterious part of the Bible of all - Revelations - to predict the coming of a better future to be brought about by those like the slum saviours. In this way, she reconciles her feminist-socialist vision with traditional millenarian Christian beliefs. The novel also presents another, more unorthodox, suggestion for how a feminist Christian utopia might come to pass. The end of the novel holds out the promise of progress towards a new future as Lobe sets off for Australia, and Jane Hardy, the labour mistress, considers emigrating in order to advance her experience of this future. She believes in ‘the infinite capabilities of women ... for *progress*’ (263, emphasis in original), and believes that these new-

world countries might be the place where women will progress and men will be 'subjected' (263). Harkness, too, puts her faith in women for the evolution of relationships between the sexes. Rather than being married to Lobe at the close of the novel, Ruth is left in a relationship with Jane, who 'began to treat [her] like a younger sister' (273). In this relationship, there is a beneficial crossing of the classes - they have already helped women factory workers together - and even a suggestion of a biological crossing. Jane recognises that Ruth is 'one of those people who cannot stand alone, who must fall to the earth if they have nothing to keep them upright' (280), and that she, as a 'hardy' specimen of a woman, must prop her up. Harkness's earlier suggestion that classes are amalgamating imbues this relationship with special significance; this mysterious crossing of these natures and classes might be what brings about the better future.

Finally, the eponymous Lobe himself, who throughout the novel is presented androgynously as physically small and delicate, is explicitly acknowledged by Jane Hardy to be a new kind of man. The last words of the novel are her declaration that: 'He isn't a man - he is a woman' (281). Earlier in the novel Lobe described the evolution of his Christianity from Evangelical, to Methodist, to Salvationism, declaring 'I shall leave directly I find any religious organization that is more in earnest' (160) - it would seem that Woman is this more earnest evolutionary zenith. The androgyny or evolution of Lobe recalls the heaven of Schreiner's *Dreams*; for both Schreiner and Harkness, a better future is predicated on a mysterious evolution of the sexes.

Harkness's *In Darkest London*, then, produces a number of tentative visions of the future, all of which can be interpreted within Christian frameworks, while they transform the theology to fit socialist and feminist utopias. In this period of disillusionment in the late 1880s, Harkness found inspiration in Schreiner's religious allegories, and *In Darkest London* shows

that this inspiration led her not only to develop her art, but also to contribute to a new feminist theology.



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<sup>1</sup> The open-access online resource *Harkives* has made a significant contribution to the recovery of Harkness's journalism.

<sup>2</sup> Melnyk's observations are based on a study of women writers whom she argues were transforming theology through writing novels, such as Emma Jane Worboise, Charlotte Yonge and Ellice Hopkins.

<sup>3</sup> For information about *To-day* see Mutch (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Another explanation for the pseudonym is that she was using a family name - George Henry Law, bishop of Bath and Wells was a relation by marriage (*Contemporary Authors Online*, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Sypher argues convincingly that she is a self-portrait (1993: 115).

<sup>6</sup> Compare also the protagonist of *A Manchester Shirtmaker* (1890), who kills her baby daughter to spare her further suffering.