

Upstream with Darwin: Christianity and Evolution in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*

Charles Kingsley's 1863 children's novel *The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* tells the story of a young chimney sweeper who undertakes two parallel but incongruous journeys along a river. The first, Tom's journey of spiritual redemption. The second, that of physical transformation; Tom begins his trip upstream tadpole-like, working to recover his human body. Kingsley, a pro-Darwinian priest of the Church of England, suggests the two journeys needn't be antithetical; however, I argue that we may read *The Water-Babies* through either a lens of natural selection or of Christianity, but never the two simultaneously. Tom is, at times, a scientific subject on an evolutionary path. By turns, he is a spiritual subject in need of redemption. Tom's journey demonstrates, in action, Darwin's theory put forth in *On the Origin of Species*, but it also positions Tom as the subject of a kind of Christian morality tale. Additionally, Kingsley's use of the fairytale as a vehicle for his story is also fraught with tension. His narrator explains that this story is one "with no moral whatsoever;" yet, *The Water-Babies* ends with a sizable chapter entitled "Moral." The moral presented is one rooted in "hard work and cold water," and it is in the simultaneously turbulent and refreshing waters of the stream in which Tom's parallel journeys occur that I argue the tensions and ambiguities present in these various moving parts are situated. If we are to find any reconciliation amongst said moving parts, we must do so inter and extratextually, by considering *The Water-Babies* as a pivot-point between two bodies of work that reflect the incongruous arguments of the text: first, of course, is Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Second, William Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper," a poem that follows a young chimney sweep, Tom Dacre, who suffers from the abhorrent treatment of children in a rapidly industrializing England and who is promised eternal salvation for doing so. In this Blake-Kingsley-Darwin triangulation, we see articulated many of the social issues at play in 19th century England, particularly as they manifest in the children's literature of the time.