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# The Industrial Fairy Tale: The Adaptable Narrative in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*

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THE INDUSTRIAL FAIRY TALE: THE ADAPTABLE NARRATIVE IN CHARLES  
KINGSLEY'S *THE WATER-BABIES*

A Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty  
Of the  
College of Liberal Arts  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Of  
Master of Arts  
In English  
Winthrop University

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By

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### Abstract

Though Charles Kingsley's mid-nineteenth century children's book, *The Water-Babies*, is generally out of favor with canons of Victorian or children's literature, I argue that *The Water-Babies* is a highly adaptable text because it is made up of conjoined opposites. The text's multiplicity of form and content as well as its emphasis on imagination make the *The Water-Babies* malleable for variation and adaptation, while the approach Kingsley took to the child audience prepared the text for an indefinite future readership. Moreover, the work's initial intent to be utilized for social change and the proto-environmentalist messages already present in the text situate *The Water-Babies* as particularly prone to ecocritical readings. By reading into Kingsley's own life and varying influences, observing the inconsistencies in style and genre in the work itself, and arguing that the book's ideological moral is to merge dualisms, I consider the possibility that *The Water-Babies* has potential staying power as an adaptation suited to modern environmental and humanitarian concerns mapped onto the narrative of a boy who explores, learns, and grows.

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## Introduction

*The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* is a fairy tale, a children's book, a parable on Darwin's theory of evolution, and a didactic work aimed at adults and children alike. It was written by a man, Charles Kingsley, who was keen on social justice issues of mid-nineteenth century England but who never adhered to one movement for long, who devoted himself to nature and the divine as though the two were synonymous, and who was determination to engender imagination and belief before doubt or dualisms in the minds of his readers though he casually perpetuated racism and xenophobia. This children's work, reflective of its author and its time, is characterized by morals and didactic messages that insist on the symbiosis between unlike terms in order for their messages to hold. The relationship between science and religion, between religion and nature, and between nature and mankind are all symbiotic within the world of *The Water-Babies*, which therefore lends itself to contemporarily-relevant ecocritical reading. Therefore, by engaging with the text's variable author and varying audience, fairy tale form and ecocritical content, I argue that *The Water-Babies* is a highly adaptable text because it is comprised of conjoined opposites.

Reverend Charles Kingsley was born on June 12, 1819 to Mary *née* Lucas and Charles Kingsley, Sr., a curate who moved his family across the Midlands of England for work. This move allowed Charles and his brother, Henry, to spend part of his impressionable childhood among the English fens. As Kingsley's wife, Fanny, later chronicled in *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life (L&M)*, this landscape remained an integral part of Kingsley's imagination throughout his later adult

life: “in those days before the draining of the Fen,” she writes, “butterflies of species now extinct, were not uncommon, and used to delight the eyes of the young naturalist,” while recollections of the sunsets over the Great Fen “had always a charm for him” (29). While the fens and their wildlife were preserved in Kingsley’s memories, the marshes themselves were drained by 1852 to be repurposed for agrarian and domestic use (*L&M* 28-29, *Great Fen*). These “scenes and traditions of this period of boyhood” eventually produced *Hereward the Wake, the Last of the English* (1866), Kingsley’s attempt to preserve the folkloric past of the now-destroyed fens while also attempting to provide literature on to the under-represented people of the lowlands (*L&M* 29; Uffelman 113). In 1831, the year following the Kingsleys’ departure from the countryside and away from childhood leisure, twelve-year-old Charles witnessed the violent Bristol Riots. Fanny wrote that “the horror of the scenes which he witnessed seemed to wake up a new courage in him,” and Kingsley himself said that witnessing these riots was his “first lesson in what is now called ‘social science’” (*L&M* 31, qtd. in Uffelman 15).

These two formative memories—one of the idyllic but transient fens, and the other of fires, looting, and death in response to a working-class uprising—fueled Kingsley’s later vocal outrage against the inhumanities produced by the industrial and agricultural revolutions alike (Colloms 14). However, as is the case with all that Kingsley argued and believed, the complications of social issues brought a level of ambivalence to Kingsley’s radical voice. For instance, Kingsley responded to the draining of the fens in his *Prose Idylls, New and Old* (1873) with a determination to view the ecosystem’s destruction as an opportunity to “bring blessings to the human race,” but he nevertheless continued to lament the loss of “the shining meres, the golden reed-beds, the countless

water-fowl, the strange and gaudy insects, [and] the wild nature” (*Prose Idylls*). As a man who espoused love for both the land and the working-class—or both science and religion—at a time when these things were put at odds, Kingsley often found himself in tricky position of finding ideological avenues where contrary values could coexist. The result is a man whose beliefs were either flighty or, more often, a comingling of opposites.

Late-twentieth-century biographer Brenda Colloms defines Kingsley's life in part according to his ambivalent relationship with Victorian middle-class values in general. Kingsley, she observes, supported the institutions of the establishment—the monarchy, aristocracy, and church—while simultaneously cultivating enemies through his more radical notions regarding issues of social justice (Colloms 13). Colloms’ contemporary, Larry K. Uffelman, suggests that Kingsley’s life is a narrative most often utilized as a mirror for the particular tumults of mid-century England (9, 15). These estimations need not, of course, be in conflict. Like an organism both informed by and informing its ecosystem, Kingsley’s life responded to the environment of change and conflict that surrounded him and found its niche in responding with conflict and changeability in kind.

In 1844, between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-five, Kingsley married Frances (Fanny) Grenfell, became rector of Eversley Church, Hampshire, and began a lifelong correspondence with theologian Reverend Fredrick Denison (F. D.) Maurice, the mentor and friend who had influenced Kingsley’s choice to become a clergyman three years prior. This choice of occupation, which diverted Kingsley’s path away from studying law at Cambridge, is notable not only for the profound impact it had on Kingsley’s life but also for the uncharacteristic contemplation that produced it. Una

Pope-Hennessy, Kingsley's mid-twentieth century biographer, ventures that Kingsley's character is more the product of momentary emotions than of sober, well-ruminated principles. His projects and passions were by and large fueled by "feeling not observation, instinct not logic," while his gift for zeal and absorption belied a lack of reflection that often led to self-contradictions in thoughts and declarations (Pope-Hennessy 3-4). Kingsley is, in fact, quite aware of his preference for observation over rumination and unabashedly advertises his views on the matter in his personal writings and letters. In 1842, writing on the proper way to observe the world, he advises that one should "[n]ever give way to reveries" and avoid "morbid introversion of mind," preferably by keeping oneself busy studying God (*L&M* 65). This study should remain simple, exuberant, and childlike, since reactionary love is, for Kingsley, preferable to redundancies of logic:

We may think too much! There is such a thing as mystifying one's self! . . . This is one form of want of simplicity. This is not being like a little child, any more than analyzing one's own feelings. A child goes straight to its point, and it hardly knows why. . . . If you wish to be like a little child, study what a little child could understand—nature; and do what a little child could do—love. (65)

It is not insignificant that Kingsley places the child's eye, or perhaps the child's heart, in the prime position to study, "admire...and adore God" through the study, admiration, and adoration of God's works—nature prime among these (64). Kingsley's commandment to respond with instinctive emotion to the world relies upon the faith that this immediate response will yield appropriate results, a faith best bestowed upon the child but one that Kingsley himself attempted to typify. However, his juvenile distaste for contemplation

left many of his arguments equally immature, as Pope-Hennessy observes, which influenced not only the consistency of his beliefs but the thematic consistency within his works themselves, as we will see.

Kingsley's caprice is not as uniformly applicable to his beliefs and behaviors as Pope-Hennessy implies. Kingsley's written account of the night of his twenty-second birthday in 1841 indicates his willingness to hold unwavering belief and illustrates, too, that to which he is capable of remaining loyal. He writes:

I have been for the last hour on the sea-shore, not dreaming, but thinking deeply and strongly, and forming determinations which are to affect my destiny through time and through eternity. Before the sleeping earth and the sleepless sea and stars I have devoted myself to God; a vow never (if He gives me the faith I pray for) to be recalled. (*L&M* 49)

Kingsley, then, is a man of God, but also a man of the natural world. In order to commit himself to a steadfast life of religious devotion, he swears his loyalty to the only thing equally divine and eternal: the earth, sea, and stars—a holy trinity of the natural landscape. And if, as this implies, his devotion to God is bound to a reverence for nature, his devotion to God is equally unsubtractable from his devotion to nature. *Glaucus; or, The Wonders of the Shore* (1855), born out of reviews of texts on marine biology, grew for Kingsley into a meditation on the relationship between the divine and the natural; it also served, as editor Brian Alderson points out, as a rehearsal for those ideas which would be developed in *The Water-Babies* (*WB* 190). In *Glaucus*, Kingsley outlines the ways in which the kingdom of nature must be accessed by the same routes as the kingdom heaven, and each observation must be appreciated “spiritually, by the amount of

divine thought revealed to him therein” (197). A natural scientist must act, Kingsley argues, by “believing that every pebble holds a treasure, every bud a revelation,” and must possess “the habit of mind which regards each fact and discover not as our own possession, but as the possession of its Creator, independent of us...or our vain glory” (197-98). “The close observation of nature,” as Uffelman notes, becomes “a fundamentally sacred obligation, for it puts mankind into communication with the only true reality: God” (132). The awe and adulation afforded to nature as an expression of the divine connects, even, to Kingsley’s logic of action before meditation. Quoting Corinthians, he claims that “in science, as in higher matters, he would will walk surely, must ‘walk by faith and not by sight’” (*WB* 195).

Despite the fact that he consistently drew his devotion into all that he worked on,<sup>1</sup> Kingsley still took to a seemingly ever-changing variety of social issues. Kingsley’s career as a writer was often highly mimetic to the social moment in which he found himself, a quality that often attracts scholars who seek to use the man as a convenient vehicle for understanding the era (Uffelman 9). History, however, can also serve as a means for understanding the author and, especially, the literature he produced. The way that Kingsley responded to the events of his time excellently reflect the author’s persona, painting Kingsley as a man both highly changeable and, more rarely, adamantly persistent. By 1848, the year of Marx and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto*, Kingsley was contributing to the Chartist movement and publishing his first novel, *Yeast: A Problem*, a novel born of the fermenting fervor for social and religious revolution and so

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<sup>1</sup> Kingsley’s shifting involvement in radical social politics combined with his image as a devout Anglican clergyman earned him the jeering nickname from those who spoke against him as the “Apostle of Socialism” (*L&M* 147).

radical Kingsley's own publisher took offense (*WB* xlvi, Baldwin 4). Within four years, the failure of Chartism<sup>2</sup> had led Kingsley into the arms of another movement, Christian Socialism, from which his second novel, *Alton Locke* (1850), emerged. By his third novel, *Hypatia; or, Old Foes with a New Face* (1853), Kingsley had immersed himself in zoology and naturalism, mature versions of a childhood fascination that continued to have a marked presence in his work and publications until the end of his career.

*Westward Ho!* (1855) came after, written in the spirit of patriotism and pro-colonial fervor during the Crimean War; this three-volume novel was especially successful for Kingsley because, as Colloms notes, *Westward Ho!* promoted propaganda agreeable to the state rather than contrary to the status quo (193).

*Westward Ho!* was also unique among Kingsley's publications to that point in that it was aimed at children; Uffelman suggests that *Westward Ho!* and Kingsley's next major work, *The Water-Babies*, together form a hallmark of childhood exposure to Kingsley that draws scholars back to the author via avenues of nostalgia (6). These were not Kingsley's only works for children, however. *Greek Heroes; or, Greek Fairy Tales* (1856) was dedicated to his own children, Rose, Maurice, and Mary, while *Madam How and Lady Why or First Lessons in Earth Lore* (1870) was in many ways for all children, serialized first in *Good Words for the Young* in 1869 and then published in a single volume in 1870, concurrently with the Elementary Education Act that effectively began

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<sup>2</sup> Chartists were those who aligned themselves with radical parliamentary reform as outlined by William Lovett's 1838 "People's Charter." Three Chartist petitions were brought to the House of Commons, and all three failed, partially due to the radicalism of the reform proposed (Everett). Kingsley was involved with the Chartist Movement primarily due to his support for working-class laborers, whose political voice was championed by Chartism.

public education in England (WB xlvi; Scott). *The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* was dedicated to his youngest, Grenville Arthur, but is, as I will argue, very much a book meant for the larger audience of Victorian children. However, it would be erroneous and perhaps impossible to only consider Kingsley's accomplishments as children's author, even when discussing one of his children's books; the activities of his life were as interwoven as the subjects of his text. Kingsley continued writing treatises and novels while accomplishing much in his professional career, becoming tutor to the Prince of Wales, a professor history at Cambridge, and even eventually being appointed canon of Westminster. An author, clergyman, professor, and father of four, Kingsley passed away from pleurisy in 1875, at the age of fifty-five, and is interred at Eversley.

Of all of these works, *The Water-Babies* is especially valuable in that, like its author, it provides insight into the period, culture, and controversies that informed it. The text addresses such subjects as children's labor practices and the relationship between the divine and nature, establishing meaningful connections between its topics with frequent didactic asides. The tale describes the journey of a young chimney-sweep, Tom, who falls into a stream after misadventure and misunderstanding. Instead of perishing in the water, the boy is transformed into a water-baby, a magical being who interacts with fairies and wildlife alike. Flowing from the stream to the sea, Tom learns the logic of the fantastic environments around him and, eventually, grows into a moral being. Because the narrative is principally immersed in a natural environment, its ideological focus on imagining the possibility of mutuality, and its genre and intended audience, *The Water-Babies* is uniquely situated to extend the text's relevance beyond its Victorian context. The text, for instance, is very much a parable constructed by Kingsley in support of

Darwin's new theories, an attempt to merge the two perceived opposites of Christian doctrine and the radical scientific theory of evolution into mutually beneficial cohabitation. While this particular controversy between science and religion was fresh in 1863, when *The Water-Babies* was serialized, time has not made the debate any less present.<sup>3</sup> It is fitting, perhaps, that it is this relationship between nature and the divine, the two subjects about which Kingsley was consistently passionate, that gives the work consistent relevance and life. Kingsley's ability to conceptualize simultaneity between disparate terms through the medium of a children's book—in this case, more specifically, a fairy tale—enables *The Water-Babies* to convey messages on issues relevant to the modern era, especially those issues that can borrow and build from conversations on topics already imbedded in the text.

In his introduction to the 2013 Penguin edition of the book, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst connects *The Water-Babies*' fascination with the ocean to the “much larger Victorian movement—at once a social drive and an imaginative drift—toward the sea,” a fascination evidenced in the period preoccupation with seaside resorts, bathing fads, and medical recommendations of the healing properties of saltwater continued from the eighteenth century<sup>4</sup> (ix-x). Kingsley takes this conception of water's cleansing and restorative powers to new heights, extending water's attributes into the realms of the

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<sup>3</sup> The debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham in February of 2014 on whether or not “creation is a viable model of origin in today's modern scientific era” received hundreds of thousands of viewers during its livestream and has over four million views on YouTube as of May 2015 (Answers in Genesis).

<sup>4</sup> The romantic conception of the sublime is perhaps another imaginative holdover from the previous century that influenced this social reverence of the sea; Kingsley certainly allowed it to color his *The Water-Babies*, as he used excerpts from the works of romantic poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to introduce each of the novel's chapters.

spiritual and social. Invigorated by the epidemic of cholera that spread across England in 1849, Kingsley preached on sanitation reform, phrased by his wife as a crusade “against dirt and bad drainage” that was concerned with the English water supply (*L&M* 118, 120). This subject of sanitation emerged in his sermons<sup>5</sup> and writing both, a prime topic in *Glaucus* and one that found its way even into *The Water-Babies*. In many ways, in fact, the latter work serves as a children’s version of the former. Though sanitation reform was Kingsley’s project primarily while constructing *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, the theme also emerges in *The Water-Babies* where “men are wasteful and dirty, and let sewers run into the sea instead of putting the stuff upon the fields like thrifty reasonable souls,” and the waste and refuse that humanity casts upon the seashore must be cleaned by the crabs and sea-anemones (*WB* 100-101). The distinction between the texts is that, in *The Water-Babies*, the power of sanitation reform seems not to lie in the works or laws of man but in the labor and harmony of nature.

However, the most notable, and indeed most revolutionary, social catalyst for *The Water-Babies* is undoubtedly Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*—or, simply, *The Origin of Species*. Kingsley was appointed in April of 1859 to the Chaplain of Ordinary to the Queen, earning him many honors, including access to an advance copy of Charles Darwin’s new text (*WB* xlvi). The work describes in greater detail what Darwin and Charles Wallace, another naturalist working on theories of selection at the same time as Darwin, had described in a co-published paper the year before (Francis

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<sup>5</sup> Three of Kingsley’s sermons on sanitation were collected and published as “What Causes Pestilence” in 1854 (*L&M* 120).

564). According to *The Origin of Species*, the ability of an organism to survive and reproduce is “naturally selected” based on the organism’s ability to respond, or adapt, to the differing demands of their environment (Darwin 13). These naturally selected traits are inherited by subsequent generations, who in turn adapt to their environment to varying degrees, thus evolving over time to best fit their niche in a given environment. The oft-repeated phrase associated with Darwin, “the survival of the fittest,” is in fact the responsibility of Herbert Spencer, the social philosopher who also created Social Darwinism (Francis 565). It is important to separate the concept of the survival of the fittest from Darwin’s theory because, though Darwin eventually incorporated the phrase into later editions of his work, Darwinian stressed evolution as a process of adaptation and not, as might be implied by the term “fittest,” progression toward a goal of perfection (565). Portions of *The Water-Babies*, including the moral message that one “must not talk about ‘ain’t’ and ‘can’t’ when you speak of this great wonderful world round you,” support the notion that the world is comprised of infinite possibilities which the imagination must be equally open to, a message that adheres to Darwin’s theorization while simultaneously encouraging its audience to accept radical theories such as Darwin’s (WB 38). However, as we will later discuss, *The Water-Babies* is not a direct representative of the theories put forth in *The Origin of Species*, and while Kingsley certainly supports Darwin’s work by arguing for the coexistence of scientific and religious ideals, *The Water-Babies*’ attempt to moralize evolution in some ways contradicts evolutionary theory.

Not only is Darwin’s influence on Kingsley essential to *The Water-Babies*, but Kingsley’s religious perspective emerged in *The Origin of Species* as well. The

clergyman's response to the text, a letter of praise, was included in the second edition of *The Origin of Species* along with edits by Darwin that explicitly mentioned the "Creator" that was conspicuously absent in the original edition (*WB* xlvi; Francis 572). The addition of Kingsley's approving letter, coming from the Queen's own chaplain, likely served the same purpose as the additional discussion of a "Creator": an afterword on the text by Oliver Francis suggests that acknowledging evolution's connection with the divine was "a largely tactical decision to prevent accusations of blasphemy," a controversy that Darwin saw as a distracting from the scientific relevance of the text (572). Such a conflict simply did not exist for Kingsley, who saw revelations of faith in revelations of science. Franny writes that her husband's life after reading *The Origin of Species*—as well as Darwin's 1862 book, *The Fertilization of Orchids*—"opened a new world to him, and made all that he saw around him, if possible, even more full of divine significance than before" (*L&M* 327). In the time leading up to the writing of *The Water-Babies* in 1862, Kingsley's life was given evenly to parish work and scientific study (327). In a letter to F. D. Maurice in 1863, a month before *The Water-Babies*' publication in book format,<sup>6</sup> Kingsley describes the point of contention in the debate between science and religion as one of false binaries. Instead, science and religion work in tandem to create what is for Kingsley another false dichotomy: a question of "God or no God" that can only be solved in the positive. "That mystery of generation has been felt in all ages to be the crux, the meeting point of heaven and earth, of God or no God," Kingsley writes, adding that humanity through the ages comes upon the question, "thank God, each time

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<sup>6</sup> *The Water-Babies* was serialized in *Macmillan's Magazine* from August 1862 to March 1863; Macmillan published the book in May (*WB* xlvi).

with more and sounder knowledge” (338). He describes the dichotomy elsewhere as a choice between “the absolute empire of accident, and a living, immanent, ever-working God” (337). In other words, Kingsley felt that when he was faced with the scientific revelations of generation—or in this case evolution—that were emerging in his time, humanity would be faced with an irreducible choice between the industrious God of Kingsley’s own imagining or a God who does not exist. In Kingsley’s words, “God is great, or else there is no God at all” (338). The great God that Kingsley conceived of as the answer to humanity’s evolutionary crux was the very same that was illustrated, through the industry of the natural world, in *The Water-Babies*

As noted above, *The Water-Babies*’ protagonist is a chimney-sweep named Tom, the figure who must act as the child reader’s ambassador throughout the fantasy and morality of the text. As Alderson notes, Tom is a name popularly used for the young heroes of children’s stories of the time (204). Kingsley’s friend and contemporary, Thomas Hughes, published two texts featuring a Tom: *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) and *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861), two popular didactic children’s stories that followed in the tradition of the evangelical religious tracts of the time and which Kingsley reviewed favorably (Landow; *WB* 204, xlvii; Bratton). Alderson adds that the name resonates additionally with the Tom from William Blake’s poem “The Chimney Sweeper” from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789). It would be only fitting to the composite nature of the text as a whole to acknowledge the possibility that Tom’s name is an amalgam of all of these possibilities. Let us add another possible source: to Kingsley’s own admittance, *The Water-Babies* is a text of “Tomfooleries,” childish foolishness and whimsy used as a vehicle for the serious moral messages of the text (qtd. in Prickett 140).

*The Water-Babies* is, after all, arguably “one of the first stories actively engaged in social critique written for children” (Carpenter 13). Its social commentary cannot be removed from the context of the work’s formation nor, indeed, from the body of the text itself.

*The Water-Babies* is a medley of its influences, behaving as one of its own Rabelaisian lists in its constant attempt to capture all that was seen as relevant or charming to its author at the time. However, because of these various constituent parts, this Victorian fairy tale becomes itself a parable for adaptability and evolution. For instance, the marriage—rather than dichotomy—of the plight of nature and that of mankind’s future generation enables *The Water-Babies* to adapt beyond its place as a mid-Victorian children’s parable and into a broader niche. It is, or becomes, an evolutionary, industrial fairy tale: a story deeply rooted in still-relevant human and environmental concerns and highly adaptable as a Victorian fairy tale as evidenced by its many illustrative evolutions. *The Water-Babies* succeeds as a children’s story and a novel about social issues because it expresses in content and in structure that potentially disparate terms may overlap and coexist; it proves, too, that a tale that coheres varying components can serve as a vehicle for various messages and yet still provide an overarching worldview.

The multiplicity of the text emerges not only within its influences, themes, or morals, but even through its reproductions. *The Water-Babies* has been treated to numerous editions, adaptations, and abridgements, illustrated by multiple artists throughout various publications, and reimagined into the modern day through theatre and cinema. Within Kingsley’s life, there were several reprints but few edits. Most changes were made during the shift from a serialized text to a single, published volume, the most

notable of these being the deletion of “L’Envoi,” the text’s short introductory poem. Following the end of the text’s copyright period, which expired in 1905,<sup>7</sup> abridgements joined full editions among the text’s numerous reprints. The abridgement by Kathleen Lines and from 1961 is, Alderson suggests, the “most distinguished” among these, perhaps due to the detailed illustrations by Harold Jones (xli). The 1886 edition, featuring Linley Sambourne’s illustrations, enjoyed the greatest distribution while the work was still under Macmillan’s copyright (*WB* xli). Along with Robert Dudley’s wood-engraved capital letters for each chapter and the two illustrations by J. Noel Paton featured in the original release of the text, *The Water-Babies* has enjoyed a wide collection of illustrations and illustrators. Some of the most notable among these include Warwick Goble, whose edition was published in 1909, William Heath Robinson (1915), and Jessie Wilcox Smith (1916). As each edition was printed in competitive to the other, these illustrations served to distinguish between each of the many editions; as of 2013, another edition has been released with original illustrations by Michael He, indicating that a market for the text and original contributions to it still exist.

Beyond a market for the book, the story of *The Water-Babies* has attracted attention as an adaptation. A film was made from the book in 1978; aimed at children, it was a hybrid of live-action and animation. As early as 1902, the novel enjoyed adaptation for the stage by Rutland Barrington (Barrington 133). In 2003, *The Water Babies* became a musical, adapted by Gary Yershon and with music written by Jason Carr. *The Water Babies: A New Musical* ran in 2014 with an original score and a shift from children to

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<sup>7</sup> The copyright law in the United Kingdom applicable to Charles Kingsley established that a work’s copyright expired either seven years after the author’s death or forty-five years after the book’s publication, whichever comes later (Sutton).

adolescent protagonists. The reception of these works is varying, though often poor, and each of these seek primarily to tailor the text to a new medium; in essence, these adaptations do not attempt to reinterpret the text in any significant way. However, there is an adaptation that adapts not only the medium but, purposefully, the content. Paul Farley's rewriting of *The Water-Babies* for a BBC Radio 4 presentation brought the story into the modern day, setting the tale no longer in the nineteenth century but the twenty-first. In order to maintain Tom as a child laborer, for example, Farley rewrote him as Tomi, a Nigerian boy who had been trafficked to England. In this way the adaptation remains true to the original through its insistence on referencing, as *The Water-Babies* did, social problems pertinent to its time and audience.

So, how can *The Water-Babies* and its period-specific morality and social concerns provide messages that can, even in adaptation, exist in a valuable way for a modern readership—beyond serving as mere insight to a previous time? I propose that there are two ways. The first is in the adaptable nature of the messages that Kingsley and his narrator put forth, especially as these are moral lessons that themselves use the logic of adaptability, sustainability, and belief. The second opportunity for relevant adaptation is accessible through the continued significance of one or more of the text's thematic issues. Child labor, dangerous and inhumane labor practices, and even the refusal of Darwinian theory due to religious dispute are all issues that *The Water-Babies* addresses and that still hold relevance today. In particular, ecocritical readings of *The Water-Babies* reveal the text's most pertinent applicability to modern social issues by revealing how the story's proto-environmentalist messages align with contemporary environmental theories, predominantly deep ecology.

Environmental concerns, often referred to under the broad heading of environmentalism, are imbedded in the text of *The Water-Babies*, which highlights the aquatic environment as a locus for Tom's moral growth. The title reflects this relationship, connecting child and water umbilically by a hyphen. *The Water-Babies* depends upon and is concerned with the environment, but it does not focus on environmental pollutants or the ways in which man adulterates his larger ecosystem—at least, it does not focus on these things in ways that a modern reader might expect. This is because, far from abating after Kingsley's lifetime, ecological and environmental issues have grown alongside increased industrial and agricultural advances that interact counterproductively with the greater natural world. Where child labor practices were pre-existing issues at the time of *The Water-Babies*' serialization and publication—the Chimney Sweeper's Act reform influenced by *The Water-Babies*' publication was originally 1788—environmental concerns were in their beginnings, and while the text suggests a concern for the environment and clearly attempts to stress the value of the natural world, environmentalism in the novel is not the environmentalism of today. However, the current context of environmental concern and the dialogue surrounding theoretical approaches to humanity and its relationship to nature—a dialogue that remains an ethical necessity—is one that, I argue, Kingsley's text is fully capable of supporting. This is because Kingsley's ideology of conjoined opposites, of belief and evolution, form an essential narrative of moral learning that, almost uncannily, supports modern environmental perspectives. In this way, the first means by which *The Water-Babies* enables adaptation—by providing messages of adaptation that are themselves

adaptable—is not exclusive from this second means of conjoined opposites. Rather, one bolsters the other, much as adaptation in a species is enabled by hybridity.

### Mixed Genres, Styles, and Audiences

Deborah Stevenson, scholar of children's literature, argues heartily against any imminent or ultimate canonization of *The Water-Babies* in part because

Children's literature depends upon a canon of sentiment, and such canons are proof against attempts at academic recovery; the academic curriculum, which is based on a canon of significance, may rediscover the historical significance of a children's author but can never truly recover it to the literature's dominant popular canon. (112)

Under this framework of children's literature, a text recouped for nostalgia's sake cannot maintain scholarly traction due to the nostalgia which provided its draw. Fond reminiscence of a childhood text as a childhood text ostensibly prevents a reading of the text as significant under any other context. Uffelman suggests that Kingsley is approached by scholars primarily as a figure whose life and works reveal the history of his age, turning the man and his life into a tool for studying the social, cultural, and religious moment of mid-nineteenth century England. If not studied from a historical perspective, Uffelman observes, Kingsley is approached for the sake of his literary accomplishments (9). However, Uffelman argues that the author's literary draw stems primarily from "one's childhood memories of *The Water-Babies* and *Westward Ho!*" (9); Kingsley exists as an object of interest, then, either in the narrow corridors of higher learning or else because of his works for children, works which are here implicitly delegated to the realm of childhood. Uffelman does not imply in his discussions of *The Water-Babies* and *Westward Ho!* that either text draws study from the academic world,

suggesting that these works are only approached as fondly-remembered works of nostalgia.

The narrative is certainly suited to the nursery rather than the study. While working for the good Sir John, the soot-covered Tom stumbles into the pristine room of young Ellie and is mistaken for a thief and is pursued into the wilderness. After briefly fleeing across the English countryside, Tom “longed so to be clean for once” and is irresistibly called to the water where he, under the spell of the fairies, falls asleep (33). Leaving behind his old body, Tom transforms into a water-baby and explores the country stream and, later, the wide seas, acquainting himself with all manner of fauna and fairies who all have a lesson to impart. The boy eventually comes across St. Brandan’s fairy isle where he reunites with Ellie and meets the fairy sisters Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, who teach Tom in tandem that “your soul makes your body, just as a snail makes his shell” (48). As a final rite of passage in Tom’s moral evolution, he must find and confront his old master, Grimes, and forgive the man for the cruelties Tom endured while still a chimney-sweep. Tom’s quest takes him through lands whose inhabitants receive didactic commentary from the narrator, and he encounters Mother Carey, the icy source of all biological life. Ultimately, Tom is able to find and forgive Grimes for his trespasses and achieve a Christian selflessness that concludes his moral metamorphosis: at the end of the tale, Tom’s pupation as a water-baby ends as he transforms into an Englishman whose works better all of humanity. After a childhood spent working as a chimney-sweep under the appropriately-named Grimes and isolated from God and the green world, Tom finds wonder and personal growth within the aquatic embrace of Mother Nature and her many representatives. *The Water-Babies* is thus, in

part, escapist narrative that transports its reader into a fantastic rendition of the wide and wild world.

However, one of the primary complaints against *The Water-Babies* is that—for all that it is written for children as a whole and Kingsley's own young son, Grenville Arthur, specifically—it is not a successful children's book. Stanley Baldwin seems to define the book by this fault when he sums up the general sentiment surrounding the story: *The Water-Babies* is a novel “about which various opinions are entertained, one of which seems to be unanimous; viz, that the book cannot be generally understood by children” (191). Though *The Water-Babies* has received modest attention from literary scholars to date, Uffelman's argument that the text is primarily approached from a perspective of nostalgia should not be entirely dismissed. If the text appeals to children so much so that they return to the book as adults, but the children themselves cannot comprehend the text, it is not unrealistic to suggest that the intended audience of *The Water-Babies* is more complex than merely “for children” or “for adults.” The complexity of audience, like the complexities of genre and style, only serves to increase the text's potential for adaptation.

Still, the novel is not flawless, nor does it deserve to be lifted uncritically from the past and placed either into the literary canon or onto children's bookshelves. Rather, its stylistic frustrations—including the concern that the book is too confused to be appropriate for children—and uncertain genre encourage investigation. Much of what is considered contradictory in Kingsley's life and works is transformed within this children's story to offer an enlightening framework of the mutuality and sustainability of terms. As Kingsley scholar and ecocritic Christopher Hamlin posits, dissolving traditions that dichotomize the functions of nature and the ambition of man and instead

acknowledging these binaries as constructions requires imaginative capability. For all that Hamlin suggests that the text effectively taps the wells of its readers' imagination—and to good use—there is some dissent over whether or not the imaginative and fantastic is at odds with the realistic and didactic. Scholars such as J. S. Bratton, John C. Hawley, and Siobhan Lam believe that Kingsley effectively blends the didactic and fantastic, exemplary of *The Water-Babies'* literary hybridity in form and content, though there is disagreement as to whether morality or imagination overwhelms the other. Stephen Prickett suggests an alternative perspective: he labels *The Water-Babies* a highly unique case of “inverted didacticism” where deeper moral messages wholly depend upon the digressive ornamentation of Kingsley's many asides (141). Without its more superficial charms, Prickett posits, the book's underlying structure is foundationless, as evidenced by the thin appeal of *The Water-Babies'* many abridgements. Prickett concludes that the story is both in earnest and parodying itself by presenting its own contradictions in ways that are simultaneously absurd and sincere. This is because the absurd and earnest messages derive from the same sentiment: that two presumably opposing terms—whether they be science and religion, nature and mankind, or realism and fantasy—are in fact symbiotic and even synonymous. As such, *The Water-Babies'* presentation of the fantastic and scientific as interchangeable in content as well as style is not merely an aesthetic novelty but an ideological necessity.

### **Children and Audience**

*The Water-Babies'* use of children as ostensible audience demonstrates the way in which Kingsley's oft-critiqued inconsistencies afford the text a hidden richness from the perspective of sustainability—both stylistically and within the plot. Allowing the young

hero Tom to stand in for Grenville Arthur and “all other good little boys,” as the dedication reads, presupposes a sort of Victorian childhood that merely reads about Tom’s own chimney-sweeping, while chimney-sweeps themselves engaged in a very different version of Victorian childhood (*WB* 3). Access to the story presupposes either a child’s own literacy or that of a doting parent, and Tom’s lack of education and proper guardianship are some of his chief obstacles as a working class child. Tom’s morally edifying adventures as a water-baby and chimney-sweep subsequently serve as opportunities to educate Grenville and other children privileged enough to be *The Water-Babies*’ audience. Actual chimney-sweepers, meanwhile, benefited from the tale materially via the instatement of new industrial safety and child labor laws catalyzed, in part, by the book. Still, didactic asides about politics, religion, and the changing landscape of science may not have been deeply appreciated by children as a whole and instead found an audience in the minds of the adults who read the work aloud.

While there is a discrepancy between the children who read the book and those about whom the book is written, the readership also experiences a divide. Kingsley's intended audience is confused because his text addresses multiple audiences at multiple times. I mean this in several ways. Firstly, as John C. Hawley surmises, *The Water-Babies* is both for the children being read to and the adults who read the text aloud, using its “nonsensical” children’s fare in order to “disarm and to teach” both parties (19). Secondly, I mean that Kingsley's general awareness of science and its importance to the larger scope of society and its future generations means that his proto-environmentalist and pro-Darwinian messages were in part intended to reach audiences of another time. Lastly, the audience of *The Water-Babies* is for readers at different times in their life. The

end of Tom's quest is spiritual betterment simultaneous with a socially-productive adulthood. As scholars who return to the text for the sake of nostalgia evidence, *The Water-Babies* speaks to the adult who eventually evolves from the child reader.

To the first point, Kingsley's so-called "queer" writing works for both children and adults, sometimes enticing the open minds of children in order to instruct, other times drawing in the pre-established minds of adults to encourage unlearning and reevaluation (Hawley 19). For instance, When Kingsley names the fairies Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby in nursery rhyme style, he packages a classic moral lesson—to treat others as you would be treated, with the counter stipulation that you will be treated as you treat others—in language charmingly designed to appeal to children. This is a likely example of what Kingsley called the "Tomfooleries" of his text. In a letter to his mentor, F. D. Maurice, Kingsley justifies the odd qualities of his newly-released children's story as being wholly necessary in order to get his moral across:

I have tried, in all sorts of queer ways, to make children and grown folks understand that there is a quite miraculous and divine element underlying all physical nature, and nobody knows anything about anything, in the sense in which they may know God in Christ, and right and wrong. And if I have wrapped up my parable in seeming Tomfooleries, it is because so only could I get the pill swallowed by a generation who are not believing with anything like their whole heart, in the living God. (qtd. in Prickett 140)

The odd but whimsical names for the sister fairies are child-friendly coatings for the moral "pill" the names relay. On the other hand, when Kingsley mentions "Sir Roderick

Murchinson, or Professor Owen, or Professor Sedgwick, or Professor Huxley” throughout the text, his reader becomes the educated adult who would perhaps find these names elsewhere in *Macmillan’s Magazine* that framed *The Water-Babies’* original serialization (WB 39).

The adult reader of Kingsley’s text cannot, either, escape the narrator’s moralizing tone ostensibly intended for children. Kingsley’s narrator speaks as father, man of God, and man of science when he pauses Tom’s story to provide didactic lecture via direct address to “my dear little man” (38). Referred to in this way, any reader must recall the acknowledgement and feel themselves in Grenville’s place, a young English boy who is undergoing an indoctrination into what is appropriate and morally robust. Similarly, Kingsley’s tongue-in-cheek criticism of the machinations of the adult world—and even of specific adults in that world—are hardly for any young person’s benefit; the referent of “dear little man” becomes either snide mask for Kingsley’s true addressee or else a heartily belittling epithet. When the narrator qualifies that their advice for thoughts and behaviors will apply “when you get older” condescendingly implies to an already-grown reader that they are, like Tom, in the infancy of their understanding of the world. Like Tom, they must become a newborn amidst the long-established workings of the world, seeking understanding and appreciation of a greater system; the adulthood garnered at the end of the tale comes from the symbolic and moral maturation, allowing the reader, like Tom, to incorporate themselves harmoniously into a natural framework both spiritual and scientific.

Drawing the audience into a reorientation of scientific or social belief is an endeavor that must operate in the long-term schema of social change. This connects to

my second point, which is that the radical religious-Darwinian messages of *The Water-Babies* were addressed toward a contemporary readership—particularly a readership of children—in order to be perpetuated into the future. In this way, the text helps construct a future ideology by designating those ideas as distinct from the past, a feat accomplished significantly through manipulation of genre and form. Kingsley incorporated and adapted a multiplicity of preexisting genre forms into the *The Water-Babies* and in so doing performed in miniature the same adaptation of scientific and religious ideas that the text promoted. The undeniable, all-ages popularity of Dickens made both the didactically-narrated novel and perhaps the format of serialization “the only effective form of propaganda” in Kingsley’s eyes (Pope-Hennessy 5). And it is propaganda that Kingsley wanted. For him, the readability of even scientific texts is paramount. The marine biology books he reviews in *The Wonders of the Shore* garner praise in that they “read like a novel” and “carry with them a certain charm of romance” (“Shore” 191, 195). Rather than separating works of science from works of fiction, Kingsley values the genre interplay: if natural science is a medium for divine appreciation of the world, and texts on natural science are the medium for introducing this field to the public, then the accessibility of these texts determines to some extent the avenues by which the common man may commune with God. It is no wonder, then, that *The Water-Babies* takes the form of a fairy tale to “feed the play of fancy” as the very means by which it should plant the germ of scientific inquiry (195).

However, Kingsley does explicitly put forth a single genre for the text in its subtitle: it is a fairy tale, one that has been contrived rather than derived from a particular oral tradition. It is a fairy tale, then, that is distinctly Victorian. Molly Clark Hillard

proposes that fairy tales are used in the Victorian era to construct the antiquated, often idealized and pastoralized past as a bygone era; since the fairy tale past appears only in stories, the modern period is comparatively advanced, secure in its separation from the magical and into the world of the industrial. By framing fairy tales in this way, Victorian culture became invested in them both as artefacts of fascination and as tropes on which their own literature was dependent. Though it does not derive from some authentic tradition of the layfolk, *The Water-Babies* can claim to be “A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby” because it uses recycled fairy imagery. The introduction of fairies to the text comes with a sort of circular logic that takes the fact of the book as a fairy tale as a given which necessitates the presence of fairies: “There must be fairies; for this is a fairy tale: and how can one have a fairy tale if there are no fairies?” (WB 34). What truly makes the book a fairy tale, however, is that it fits this framework that Hillard puts forth by using the genre in order to construct a particular kind of modern Victorian world—one where “the great fairy Science . . . is likely to be queen of all the fairies for many a year to come” (47).

Baldwin adds that the fairy tale—he refers to *The Water-Babies* as such—becomes after the first chapter “a homily” and reminds the reader of Kingsley’s prefacing rhyme:

Come read me my riddle, my good little man;

If you cannot read it no grown-up folk can.

Kingsley, here endowing children with perception beyond that of adults, keenly felt the importance of children as keepers of the future. He wrote that his interest in “Science herself” was the selfsame interest in “the health, the wealth, the wisdom of generations

yet unborn” (*L&M* 336). The a life devoted to science, he felt, was noble because it became “useful to thousands whom you have never seen, but who may be blessing your name hundreds of years after you are mouldering in the grave” (366). Kingsley’s conception of science is as a vehicle for the hard work of a life well-lived, sustaining and preserving the usefulness of mortal labors into the future of humanity, uniting the “generations yet unborn” with the man whose corporeal corpse decomposes. When speaking on sanitation reform several years prior, Kingsley reiterated that children are valuable resources of the state and its legacy that therefore require due investment: it is “one of the noblest of duties . . . to see that every child that is born into this great nation of England be developed to the highest pitch,” to which purpose, he goes on to argue, proper sanitary legislation must be passed (294).

Kingsley’s concern with and focus on children speaks to the larger cultural shift that was the construction of childhood in industrial Victorian England and its impact on and representation in the literature of that time. Fiction was crafted specifically for children in order to temper those children for their future place in the class strata. Such works as Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1837) and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “The Cry of the Children” (1843)—even William Blake’s much earlier “The Chimney Sweeper” poems (1789-1794)—depict the atrocities of childhood divested of safety and domesticity in order to elicit a moral response from their readers. However, Linda C. Berry maintains that these works were intended primarily for adult audiences, as it is the adults, not the children, who hold the power to reform labor laws. Those works that were composed to influence children during the Victorian era were typically, as J. S. Bratton describes, evangelical religious tracts distributed in school. In the schoolhouse, these

religiously-inspired tales served to educate children in moral conduct; Kingsley's stories for children are all overtly didactic, but they also extend beyond the tracts that populated early Victorian public schools in their artistry. Bratton places Charles Kingsley and his contemporary George MacDonald beside one another in the canon of Victorian children's fiction because both are defined, for her, as authors whose "didactic fantasies" for children are the culmination of moralizing evangelical traditions that simultaneously appropriate fantasy and fairytale forms to tell stories of the transformative soul (70). However, Humphrey Carpenter feels that these works are not the epoch of evangelical didacticism: they are the beginnings of a fantastic escape.

The sentiment is echoed by Siobhan Lam, who argues in "Revising the Fairytale" that Kingsley's text "takes a significantly large step away from the grim didacticism of traditional Victorian children's literature." Nevertheless, the text in no way evidences a total severance from its didactic forefathers. Lam makes the point that Kingsley's fairy tale is the "liberal Protestant version" of the preceding tradition of children's religious tracts. Again, *The Water-Babies* works as a product of past works and as a literary evolution. Lam argues that Kingsley has cast off the traditional tract of his evangelical predecessors, but, as Kingsley himself may have pointed out, his work develops from the modes of the past, adapting to the needs of the present. Kingsley's novel develops into fantasy by diverging from the standard, "grim" plot of most children's tracts of the age while still remaining definitively moralizing—an evolutionary link, as it were, that effectively marks the terminal height of moralizing children's texts and the beginning of the fantastic new era, the Golden Age of children's literature (Carpenter).

And, as with any adaptation, *The Water-Babies*' hybridized style responds to the particularities of its environment. Kingsley's adaptation of the Evangelically moral through the fantastic allows him to mold his message to the historic and cultural needs of his historical, cultural moment, meaning that the story's morals suit the author's particular ideology. Kingsley and his text delight in finding truisms that are transcendently applicable to God, man, and nature, attempting to establish laws of mutually divine and scientific perception and open-minded understanding that would, hopefully, apply into the indefinite future—or, as *The Water-Babies*' narrator often says, “until the coming of the Cocqigrues” (*WB* 38). The nature of these widely-applicable lessons often themselves reflect the desire to have rules and truths for nature which are not only learnable but sustainable. When water-babies are introduced as a concept, the reader's voice interrupts to complain that “a water-baby is contrary to nature,” earning the narrator's reprimand that “when you get older . . . [y]ou must not talk about ‘ain't’ and ‘can't’ when you speak of this great wonderful world round you” (38). Where belief is glorified, doubt is an obstacle and enemy to enlightenment, especially as it is the wall of doubt surrounding Darwin's radical theories that Kingsley especially wishes to overcome. Part of the success of Kingsley's marriage of evolution and religion is due to his understanding of science as a system of belief that is subjected to the skepticism of society at large.

In presenting these two terms of realism and fantasy together as mutual rather than dual, Kingsley presents to young readers an openness of mind that operates outside of those dichotomies that Douglas-Fairhurst takes for granted. This is the power of imagination that Hamlin points to in the text, present even when environmental messages

are not on the forefront. J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906) puts forth the same power of presuming belief as a default since Peter is able to fly simply because no moment of doubt has suggested to him that he cannot: "The reason birds can fly and we can't is simply that they have perfect faith, for to have faith is to have wings" (143). Barrie's fantasy uses an aerial rather than aquatic boy hero; nevertheless, the wonderment of both protagonists derives from their alignment with fairies, animals, and the natural world. Like in *The Water-Babies*, the child hero is something of boy, beast, and fairy in one, and it is Peter's acknowledged avian source that provides him with the faith that powers his flight just as it provides the narrator an opportunity to moralize to the reader about this faith. Part of the power of *The Water-Babies* is that it tries to present the wonder of evolution on an individual, moral scale. For Tom, to have faith is to have gills: faith lies in Tom's miniaturized and truncated version of evolution, the ability to gain and lose gills as he lives through a microcosmic representation of evolution. It is a faith in the continuity of nature that is at stake within *The Water-Babies*. The natural world of Kingsley is definitively divine and Darwinian, so the natural environments that he crafts reflect and house the ideology he seeks to perpetuate, which is why the evolution of the body and soul are simultaneous with the faith-establishing process of bathing beneath the waves.

### **Theme and Meaning**

The imaginative and ideological power of the text derives from Kingsley's desire to avoid reducing the complex interrelation of humanity and nature into separate, binary terms. Humanity is, after all, a breed of beast: the demarcation between man and animal is fluid on the scale of the species just as it is for an individual. The threat of regressing

into an animal form is as present an outcome for Tom as is his potential salvation. Tom begins his journey by running into the wilderness “like a small black gorilla” (WB 19, 17); later, after he has forgotten what it is to be human, he recognizes men first as “great two-legged creatures” that are then recognized as men but who, due to their “foul clothes on their backs, foul words on their lips” are demoted to “savage” (69-70). Once in the ocean, Tom is informed that he is as likely to develop into a proper man as he is to degenerate into a creature “covered with prickles” as a result of his bad behavior (118). As Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid says to Tom, “if I can turn beasts into men, I can, by the same laws of circumstance, and selection, and competition, turn men into beasts” (129). Tom is as much threatened to revert into a highly racialized stereotype of backward evolution as he is potentially capable of moral, thus material, forward progress. Kingsley’s continuum of good and bad behavior is, in fact, the source of this continuum of biological expression, as the state of the soul acts as the genetic code out of which the body’s form is the expressed phenotype. Kingsley’s narrator declares the “doctrine of this wonderful fairy tale” to be that “your soul makes your body, just as a snail makes his shell” (48). Interestingly, he couches this doctrine in a biological metaphor; when suggesting the same concept elsewhere in terms of contemporary “new philosophy,” referring either to spiritualism or scientific materialism, the narrator says only that it “may have been so” that there are “spiritual causes for physical phenomenon” (123).

Perhaps one of the chief charms of the tale is the lack of demarcation between animal and man through this fantastic anthropomorphism. On the run from Sir John and his household at the beginning of the novel, Tom ventures out onto Harthover Fell where he immediately begins to notice the many creatures that occupy its space. Tom does not

know the words for the world around him, however, and watches a mother fox with an eye unadulterated by foreknowledge of foxes: through the omniscient narrator, the reader enjoys Tom's observations that she is "a great brown sharpnosed creature" who enjoys the sunshine and her cubs' play (*WB* 22). It is the narrator who provides a name for the creature, calling her not a fox but Mrs. Vixen, invoking an anthropomorphic domesticity that reappears immediately in the description of the cock-grouse and his wife and that is employed for comedic and satiric effect throughout the story. Tom's own transformation is an evolution into a hybrid of man and animal, the magical act that not only transforms Tom's body into a water-baby but the body of the text into a fairy tale, one that is informed by the nature of such naturalistic adaptations.

All of this hybridizing, transformative, and animalistic imagery convalesces in fairy tale terms the radical new precepts of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. *The Water-Babies* submerges itself in Darwin's theories of evolution and adaptation just as it does the watery ecosystems, incorporating Darwin's theorization—intrinsic to Kingsley's umbrella ideology—as a given in the methods of the natural world. Kingsley perhaps had a penchant for typifying Darwin's ideas in aquatic terms: after *The Origin of Species* was released to the public, Kingsley wrote to a colleague that "Darwin is conquering everywhere, and rushing in like a flood, by the mere force of truth and fact" (*L&M* 337). This letter to F. D. Maurice, dated 1863, is concurrent with the book publication of *The Water-Babies* by Macmillan as well as Kingsley's election as a Fellow of the Geological Society (Douglas-Fairhurst xlvi). The naturalist strains of Kingsley's world remain, as evidenced by this intra-ecclesiastical correspondence, pointedly religious: in the metaphoric wake of Darwin's flood, Kingsley finds himself a figure among the clergy

and scientific communities alike for his uncanny ability to hold two dichotomized ideologies in one hand, or within one story.

As Hamlin points out, Kingsley was fully capable of incorporating various conceptions of nature that differed from one another and yet integrate them all into a cohesion of simultaneous difference (258). Rather than fall prey to simply relying upon or reaffirming various “heuristic ‘natures’” of mythic and cultural pasts, Kingsley adapts these constructions of nature to suit his story, subsequently drawing attention to their constructed states in order to then use them to the story’s advantage. That multiple figures represent Nature in the text—“the four female divinities” that Hamlin and Wood identify as the fairy queen, Mother Carey, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby—further replaces a single embodiment of nature with a chimeric one: adaptable, fluid, and cohabitating (Hamlin 258; “(Em)Bracing” 199). Coexistence of separate constructions of nature is furthermore harmonious and, in a sense, natural within the context of the story that depends so heavily upon amalgamation. While “old Mrs. Earth” lies sleeping in her beauty, another divinity of Nature, the fairy queen disguised as the “poor Irish woman,” is up and about, suggesting to Tom for what is likely the first time in his young life that he should have prayers to say and a sea to bathe in (*WB* 9).

It should be noted, too, that while Mother Earth dreams, the fairy queen tells stories. Mrs. Earth here is “silent” and “asleep” as Tom’s own awareness of his interrelation with her, but her loveliness causes Tom to “look[. . .], and look[. . .]” and crave to go beyond the gate and interact with the flora and fauna of the scene (9). The Irish woman’s stories of the sea cause a similar reaction in him: “Tom longed to go and

see the sea, and bathe in it likewise” (10). Still caught beneath the thumb of his unwashed master and his duties as a chimney-sweep, Tom does not yet immerse himself in the natural world. Instead, his character is imbued with the promise of redemption out of filth, misery, and godlessness through his desire to interact with the world, enabled by his imagination. Moreover, while the sight of the natural world just beyond a gate inspires Tom, it is the Irish woman’s stories of the sea that instigate his desire to bathe, that all-important symbol of equal parts bodily and spiritual redemption. *The Water-Babies* as a whole mirrors the Irish woman’s stories here, as it, too, is of the wonders of the sea, just as it encourages its readers to wash, to immerse themselves in the natural world, and even to play.

Stories, then, are not simply passive artifacts. They have the power to inspire imagination, which is itself a byway between studying and interacting. Imagination becomes a tool for reconceptualizing the world and its interrelationships, whether between God and nature, man and nature, or man and God; Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* arguably seeks to triangulate these particular relationships into the author’s own divine Darwinian ideology. Imagination is that means of reaching beyond the present understanding and into infinitely complex alternative frameworks. In the realm of ecocriticism, as Hamlin says, this means recognizing the willful self beyond the confines of evolutionary predetermination while mutually accepting both individual autonomy and naturally-interconnected evolution. But if *The Water-Babies* is a narrative that immerses the reader in nature both fantastically and conceptually, its particular readership must be addressed. As a children’s story, Kingsley’s text about evolutionary development depends in part on the still-developing minds of the youth toward whom it is aimed.

In these ways, *The Water-Babies* diverges from the common topics of the typical children's religious tracts that preceded it. Kingsley writes his moral tale outside of the somber rooms of deathbed conversion and into the adventuresome world of moral transformation. That is because while Kingsley is still, as Lam concedes, "a faithful British Victorian preacher," his is a text about the moral development of the spirit; the narrative of a bettering process is valorized over anecdotes of redemptive revelation, allowing his text to read as mimetic to the process of evolution Kingsley is championing. The deathbed conversion trope popular to these evangelical tracts is, after all, a decidedly fatal one with a terminal goal: to swear oneself to God and ensure a position of eternal reward for an immortal soul (Bratton 40, 42). The result is a secure but static and unchanging soul granted to the converted as an absolute and transcendent state of spiritual perfection; these terminal conversions are, essentially, a one-step evolution of the soul that immediately reaches its desired end. But just as death cycles back to life in the ecosystem, the ideal trajectory of the soul in Kingsley's new schema is not to a resting point but instead toward continual growth.

Therefore, Kingsley's story of salvation and spiritual betterment is a process: Tom begins as an unwashed child, regresses in age in order to be washed and raised as a submerged infant, progresses morally while underwater, and concludes his baptism as a morally appropriate man. The process ends in an enlightened Tom who may go on to benefit society: he becomes "a great man of science, [who] can plan railroads, and steam-engines, and electric telegraphs, and rifled guns, and so forth" (*WB* 179). His spiritual epiphany does not receive immediate preservation in death; instead, Tom is released onto

the world of man to use his bodily and spiritual cleanliness productively, effecting the world and society by acting upon it to bring about beneficial change.

The nature—or unnaturalness—of Tom’s social productivity may potentially ring discordant to modern readers with an environmentalist’s eye, as the industrial is often binarized against the natural. Moreover, Tom’s ultimate occupation does not seem to follow from his adventures. The ability to further railroads, steam engines, telegraphs, guns, and “so forth” implies that Tom has somehow during his stay under the sea taken up a vocation in constructing industrial miscellany. There is in this detail an opportunity to voice what would be an anachronistic environmentalist’s complaint against the industrial nature of Tom’s adult labors, one which I will soon address. For all that *The Water-Babies* earns its criticism and continues to receive complaints against its inclusion in a canon wider than Kingsley’s oeuvre, the text’s ecocritical reception proves there is yet new life in this old work. Moreover, this life serves a purpose appropriate to its influential position as a children’s text. This is a work of destruction, as Hamlin argues, but that does not bar the possibility that *The Water-Babies* is, simultaneously, a work of adaptation, perseverance, and survival. The mutual acknowledgement of terms that this children’s text requires of its readers it also demands of its critics.

## The Green Industry

*The Water-Babies*' immersion within and continual referencing of the wonder and workings of the wild world makes the text an easy target of ecocritical readings.

Ecocriticism, the analysis of texts or cultural artefacts and their relationship to the physical or natural environment, differs from ecological studies in its primarily theoretical rather than practical approach to environmental change (Garrard 3). The prioritization of theoretical and ideological over scientific, real-world change has earned ecocritical perspectives some criticism as ineffectual outside of literary studies (26).

However, texts such as *The Water-Babies*, which have a precedent of enacting social change and which are intentionally designed to influence public and critical perception, are uniquely situated as vehicles to make ecocritical perspectives accessible to lay audiences—in this case, particularly audiences of children. Because of its didacticism focused on moralizing the mutuality of contrary terms, *The Water-Babies* is particularly useful in emphasizing the symbiosis of humanity, nature, and even industry. One of the primary conflicts in environmental discussion stems from the persistent dualism constructed between humanity and the natural environment. *The Water-Babies* collapses this binary by emphasizing that mankind is insubtractable from nature, and vice-versa, by reimagining nature as inherently moral, divine, and industrial.

As *The Water-Babies*' strong focus on the polluted and the sanitary suggests, approaching Kingsley's life and works through an ecocritical lens is not entirely novel. Naomi Wood's 1995 piece, "A (Sea) Green Victorian," introduces the idea of reading Kingsley as a proto-environmentalist and *The Water-Babies*, especially, as a text that condemns pollution as a nature-damaging byproduct of industrial human progress,

making it “both Victorian and radical” (233). Wood rightly argues that the book is still useful as a social novel despite any anachronistic perceptions of environmentalism because its metaphors enable readers, especially young readers, to imagine themselves as components of a larger Nature. Further into the present, Christopher Hamlin’s 2012 “From Being Green to Green Being” provides a reading of Charles Kingsley’s life and literary career through a green lens, uniting his many roles via the prevalent thread of an environmentally-aware identity. For Kingsley, Hamlin argues, imagination becomes the passage between the active and passive realms of work and contemplation. Because of this particular conceptualization of imagination as a means of accessing new and different ideologies, Hamlin suggests that we read Kingsley not only as a proto-environmentalist but as a “prescient theorist” who provides a highly beneficial means of constructing answers to seemingly unmarriageable dichotomies within ecocritical understandings of texts and the world (258).

The environmental resonance of *The Water-Babies* comes in part from the narrative that so highly values nature because, for Kingsley, the natural world is an unsubtractable element of the divine. This is not to suggest that Kingsley reads nature and the material plane as significant only for their transcendent potential and applicability to divine and moral order. Rather, as Hamlin points out, “materiality mattered even for clergyman Kingsley,” and the green world possessed for him an inherent wonder independent of, as well as intimately enmeshed with, the divine (258). This unmistakable love for the green—and sea-green—world is what leads Hamlin and Wood to engage with Kingsley as a proto-environmentalist; Paul Farley, a modern adapter of *The Water-Babies*, additionally suggests that Kingsley was a “proto-conservationist.” However, for

the purposes of this paper, *The Water-Babies* will be investigated insofar as it provides a gateway for understanding a particular modern ecocritical model: deep ecology. For the purposes of this discussion, I will employ the definition of deep ecology implemented by sustainability and ecocriticism scholar, Greg Garrard. Whereas environmentalism refers to an environmentally-conscious activism that does not ultimately threaten or subvert the hegemonic status quo of society, deep ecology attempts to more radically reorient societies' and individuals' understanding of the self in relation to nature (Garrard 22, 24). Specifically, deep ecology "demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature" while trying to simultaneously attempting to erase the dualism between anthropocentrism and environmentalism by recognizing humanity as an integral part of nature (24, 32). Of course, these conceptions of environmentalism are anachronistic to the mid-nineteenth century, despite the remarkable extent to which Kingsley's parables for divinity, nature, and mankind in *The Water-Babies* are applicable to deep ecology's value system. The novel's proto-environmentalism, however, makes the text fertile ground for potentially incorporating present environmental perspectives in modern reproductions and adaptations.

The precepts of deep ecology adhere well to *The Water-Babies*' environmental ideologies in large part because it, like Kingsley, recognizes the problematic construction of conflict within mutual components. Garrard outlines ecocriticism in terms of how it is understood and rearticulated by society: deep ecology "identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis" (24). The movement subsequently demands "a return to monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere," prioritizing a deep connection

between mankind and nature (24). The success of such a system, as Garrard notes, is that the human-ecosystem connection be understood in the proper terms: mankind and the environment must be understood to exist in profound symbiosis so that esteem for nature is not mistaken for misanthropy (25). Interestingly, it is a failure to recognize continuums of mutual interest that frustrates this movement in regard to another false dualism: spiritual or primal intuition against scientific study. Occasionally, the ecology of ecologists is disdained and dismissed by ecocritics, not on the basis of being scientifically unsound or environmentally harmful but because of a perceived betrayal of non-anthropocentric ideals (26). The binary logic that separates humans and the environment extends to distinguish the natural and organic from the un-natural, synthetic, and man-made. When applied to this binary opposition, human innovation—despite its potential to be applied with great benefit to environmental concerns—can be rendered in the harsh geometric lines of a science exclusive from the organic world. Looking to the Victorian age, technological advances, environmental pollutants, and inhumane labor practices were simultaneous products of the same Industrial Revolution, offering a ready conflation along a binary equation that provides a narrative of manmade ecological and ethical evils.

However, the nature-technology dichotomy is a false one: the same continuum established between nature and man can be extended to the products of man, which, far from being distinct from nature or natural processes, remain intimately connected to the environments in which they are produced. An understanding of the biological is not unrelated to an understanding of the technological: “Darwin's theory of evolution,” Manlove suggests, “might not have been formulated without the medium of mechanical amelioration in which he lived” (214). In an industrial age, mechanistic metaphors

became a means for accessing the world at large, the natural world notwithstanding. *The Origin of Species*, like *The Water-Babies*, utilized the logic of its cultural and historical moment and extended that logic, by an imaginative stretch, beyond its usual boundaries. Kingsley therefore illuminates his conceptualization of the natural world through mechanical terms—that is to say, through the logic of the industrial age. The metaphors themselves, meanwhile, enact the equivocation of unlike terms that Kingsley strives to implement in his text: the natural environment operates, according to its orchestration by “a living, immanent, ever-working God,” analogous to the intricacies of the machinery of man (*L&M* 337).

Tom enacts this relationship between God and nature, man’s morality and nature, and man’s technical creation. Because the adult Tom at the end of the text is the product of the moral and imaginative journey of *The Water-Babies*, the technologies he produces are an extension of the natural and divine. Since “no one ever marries in a fairy tale, under the rank of prince or a princess,” and Tom and Ellie therefore do not wed, Tom does not create any biological progeny that would carry out a full Darwinian arc of adaptation, evolution, and reproduction. Instead, the “railroads, and steam-engines, and electric telegraphs, and rifled guns, and so forth” Tom creates are his reproductions, the mechanical children that carry on his ideological rather than biological genes (*WB* 179). Tom’s industrial productivity is also an imaginative productivity, as inventions such as railways and telegraphs are marvels produced from human innovation expressed in technical terms.<sup>8</sup> It is appropriate that Tom should pass on ideologies rather than

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<sup>8</sup> It is unsurprising that Tom’s imaginative contributions to humanity suit the industrial world Kingsley was writing in, and it is easy to imagine how a modern adaptation of the

offspring, as it is an ideological and moral evolution that Tom undergoes in *The Water-Babies*; furthermore, Tom's technological and industrial reproduction furthers mankind as a species rather than Tom as an individual, maintaining the book's purpose as a cultural imperative rather than an individual journey. Just as the book's reader receives its lessons alongside Tom and ostensibly undergoes the same moral development, the reader can follow Tom's footsteps as a fully-formed adult by utilizing the imagination to further a larger system of humanity and nature. Tom's signification for a greater humanity is strongest when he appropriately engages with a greater world: after Tom learns to respect rather than harass animals, the narrator assures the reader that Tom "tormented no sea-beasts . . . as long as he lived; and he is quite alive . . . still" (113). Like a moral perpetual motion machine, Tom and the humanity he represents are granted a form of immortality that is implicitly contingent upon his continuous, harmonious coexistence with nature.

Life and natural (re)production occur throughout *The Water-Babies* in terms of mechanical production, as well. The motherly figures in the text are aligned with and representative of nature and its processes, which reflect the "living, immanent, ever-working God" that, according to Kingsley's imagining, produced them (*L&M* 337). Nature and her representatives are, then, expressions of divine industry endowed with divine authority, meaning that the mothers in *The Water-Babies* both reprimand and nurture Tom in ways that are framed as necessary, instinctive, and immediate responses to Tom's human behavior. In other words, the environment fails to reward Tom's amoral

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text might update Tom's innovations to current society-advancing technologies, such as those that further alternative or renewable energy.

actions in the same way that it fails to encourage ineffectual adaptations, responding to Tom according to a preexisting mechanism of logic. For instance, when Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid punishes Tom for his bad behavior, she advises him not to hold the punishment against her “because she was wound up inside, like watches, and could not help doing things whether she liked or not” (*WB* 123). Elsewhere she explains that she “work[s] by machinery, just like an engine; and am full of wheels and springs inside; and am wound up very carefully, so that [she] cannot help going” (106). So perfect is her machinery, in fact, that she is a self-sustaining energy source: she was “wound up once and for all” so that she is “as old as Eternity,” a constancy of natural and moral truths that behave forever precisely as they are meant to (106). Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby—Bedonebyasyoudid’s counterweight and sister—is nurturing with an equally mechanical compulsion: when she is told Tom never had a mother, her response is simple and immediate: “Then I will be his mother” (111). The eternity of nature’s reproduction, though, is paramount in Mother Carey, who “sits making old beasts new all the year round” by making things “make themselves” (145, 147).

This power to perpetuate life and natural processes by making things make themselves extends the busy industry of God through nature and into the denizens of the natural landscape. Individual creatures are therefore also creatures of industry and production, as with the aquatic creature that Tom observes making bricks, a creature whose body is comprised of “two big wheels . . . spinning round and round like the wheels in a thrashing machine”<sup>9</sup> (49). The animal’s body is described specifically as

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Alderson, editor of the Penguin edition of *The Water-Babies*, suggests that in this passage Kingsley describes the tube-dwelling rotifer. The wheels of this creature are its rotating cilia and the bricks described are components of a protective structure (213).

“machinery,” and its habitat-building is equated with brick-production (49). Even the overarching morals of *The Water-Babies* come through as both natural and industrial. Kingsley’s narrator proclaims that “the doctrine of this wonderful fairy tale” is that “your soul makes your body, just as a snail makes his shell,” a decidedly biological metaphor that compliments its mechanical alternative, “that your body makes your soul, as if a steam engine could make its own coke” (48, 47).

These mechanical and industrial metaphors also paint a wider picture of a natural world that responds and adapts to its circumstances in order to thrive—but it is crucial to note that thriving is not synonymous with remaining the same, especially as survival so often requires adjustment and change. Environmental philosopher and ethicist Colleen Clements rejects the “fairy tale ideal” of an ecosystem whose teleological goal is one of perfected stasis (qtd. in Garrard 64). “Equilibrium, or balance, or stasis, is not,” Clements argues, “a well-meshed, smoothly-working, serene system but one representing many stasis breakdowns compensated for by new inputs which keep the oscillations within certain critical limits” (qtd. in Garrard 64). These critical limits are indeterminate, however, suggesting that extreme variables may be introduced such that the system is threatened with collapse, something it may perhaps never experience. It is curious, then, that Clements should have chosen to describe this stasis-oriented understanding of the environment as a “fairy tale ideal.” On one hand, the fairies in *The Water-Babies* are maintenance workers, keeping the world as-is in order to be sure that the system will continue. In turn, the holistic entity of nature is enabled in part by the magic of these undersea inhabitants. For instance, Tom discovers that after storms sweep through rock pools, the water-babies “mended all the broken sea-weed, and put all the rock pools in

order, and planted all the shells again in the sand” in order that no one could “see where the ugly storm swept in last week” (*WB* 100). The water-babies’ mending and cleaning, ostensibly, maintains an unchanging natural landscape, the stasis that Clements calls a fantasy. In a sense, of course, it is a fantasy to suppose magical beings keep lucky sections of the ecosystem tidy, and the creatures’ attempt to restore a status quo when they put the rock pools “to rights again” is the very fallacy that Clements points out (100).

However, in order to maintain the world, the fairies, water-babies, and laborers of nature must work continuously. St. Brendan’s fairy isle is kept “sweet and clean” by no smaller army than “ten thousand sea-anemones, and corals and madrepores, who scavenged the water all day long, and kept it nice and pure” (102). The industrial qualities of natural production are imbued with the industry of the author who proclaims of himself, “If I stop, I go down. I must work” (*L&M* 61). Kingsley must have recognized the discrepancy between the moral of hard work he espoused and the polluting effects of industry, however, for his passage on the sea-anemones clearing the water is given an addendum. In order to “make up to them for having to do such nasty work, they were not left black and dirty, as poor chimney-sweeps and dustmen are” (*WB* 102); instead, the “considerate and just” fairies dress the creatures in vibrant colors “till they look like vast flower-beds of gay blossoms” (103). Here, the labor of the chimney-sweeps is lamentable not because it mortally endangers children but because it covers those children with soot, the symbolic adulterator of the soul. The nature of the cleaning work itself is, in fact, valorized, and the difference is that those creatures that maintain and sustain the natural world are rewarded by the beauty and vivacity they themselves engender in the world.

Chimney-sweeping, alternatively, has no reciprocated reward because it is a labor done among a world of men removed from the holistically divine. This is the benefit and detriment of industry: industry, meaning labor and its machinations, has no inherent value. It must instead be placed, like a cog, into the workings of a system or ideology; as an expression of God, the natural world is always fertile and productive in positive moral ways. However, since man is capable of moral good but does not necessarily express this good, industry in the hands of mankind may perpetuate either the savage or the divine.

The proto-environmentalist concepts themselves stem from the same ideological source that Kingsley uses as the seat of his didactic messages throughout the text, the same quality of the text, in fact, that serves as the primary enabler of the text's potential adaptation and modern reconceptualization: imagination—specifically, imagination as a foundation for belief. If the lesson that *The Water-Babies* offers is an exercise of conceiving the inconceivable, the locus of belief and imagination is found in the story's gray spaces and its potential for contradiction. In considering the story's green world, a modern reader may locate many contradictions, not least among them Tom's ultimate calling as a maker and maintainer of machinery despite his moral growth amidst, and often via, nature and its denizens. However, what is revealed is not a contradiction between the naturalistic ideology Tom is taught and the industrial world that Tom supports. Instead, a gap emerges between modern constructions of the natural and manmade and how that relationship is perceived and reproduced by Kingsley. While certainly informed by his cultural and historical moment, Kingsley's understanding of nature and its relationship to mankind—as well as to individual men—is not unlike those precepts proposed by modern schools of deep ecology and the environmental justice

movement. *The Water-Babies*' adaptable potential is particularly rich for a mutually environmentally- and socially-beneficial reimagining, particularly as the story already seeks to illustrate humanity and the environment as mutually inclusive.

Since Kingsley so often coupled the dire needs of his nation's future with the ennobling imperative of improving the children of tomorrow, *The Water-Babies* could have no better subject matter in Tom. Tom is a working-class protagonist who breaks free from the inhumane practice of child labor, which includes breaking free from an upbringing without religious instruction. However, much as the fairy tale effectively influenced real social change in labor laws to protect child workers in Kingsley's age, the narrative of *The Water-Babies* improves the young chimney-sweep's life for the better. In the projected future laid out at the novel's close, Tom is again employed but with the crucial change that he is now an adult. The concerns attributed to child labor are rectified, as Tom now has a mother in all of nature who—as Ellie's bedroom image of Jesus foreshadowed—held the infant Tom up to divine grace. Tom is no longer under the irreligious, adulterating influence of Grimes, and nor is he vulnerable to another such influence. The education afforded him by the natural world and its governesses during his (re)developmental stage not only provides Tom with the self-possession required during adulthood—it is the very thing that allows and catalyzes Tom's adult self.

The relatively slapdash transfiguration of Tom from a water-baby to a fully-grown Englishman not a mark of poor denouement but rather a clear expression of the extent of Tom's developmental success. As the narrator outlines in the final section of the book, unambiguously titled "Moral," creatures may only hope to transform into water-babies and "after that into land-babies; and after that, perhaps, into grown men" if they

“stick to hard work and cold water” (181). Tom has water enough as a water-baby, and he finds hard work in learning to “stare[. . .] with all his eyes” until he had “seen so much in his travels that he had quite given up being astonished” and so instead accepts marvels without hesitance (52, 178). Any further adolescence would be redundant: Tom’s cleanliness and his ability to believe and perceive are all that Kingsley’s tale require of a proper Englishman, and therefore, possessing these traits, Tom is one. Tom applies these virtues, garnered in the fairy land and the green sea, to the greater good of society as a further expression of the lessons Tom has learned. Carpenter claims that the text is “one of the first stories actively engaged in social critique written for children” (13). When focusing on the proto-ecocritical components of this critique, the reader must remember that *The Water-Babies* was indeed written so early that, as Wood points out, the term “ecology” had not yet been coined<sup>10</sup> (“Sea Green” 234). Kingsley did not have access to so specific a term, and in many ways he was not attempting to discuss the environment in strictly ecological terms. Instead, he was producing texts on the environment and its relationship with mankind in an era where ideas of ecological and environmental concern were beginning to emerge. As such, the text achieves a radical stance on humanity’s place in the environment, even by modern terms.

### **Water and Dirt**

How can it be that Kingsley, who imbues the natural world with such moral and divine weight, explains this organic realm in mechanical terms? Why, further, does his protagonist go on to work in the industrial world as if in implicit idealization of the trains,

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<sup>10</sup> The word “ecology” was first used by Ernst Haeckel, a German naturalist, in 1866 (“Sea Green” 234).

guns, and machines that the adult Tom creates? Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" (1843) situates the mortal and religious plight of laboring children within the wheels and cogs of the factory itself:

Let them feel that this cold metallic motion  
 Is not all the life God fashions or reveals—  
 Let them prove their inward souls against the notion  
 That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!—  
 Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,  
 As if Fate in each were stark;  
 And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,  
 Spin on blindly in the dark. (154)

By Browning's estimation, the iron machine of industry entraps the very souls of children, keeping them from even God's call and fashioning an existence that is not reflective of the full life God provides. The darkness of the factory—or in *The Water-Babies*, the darkness of soot in Tom's profession—cuts children off from God and nature simultaneously; in a text where God is intrinsic in nature, the moral isolation labor forces upon children cannot be extricated from the children's simultaneous removal from nature. For Tom, the wondrous return to nature must be at once an escape from the industrial hardship of Victorian child labor and an immersion in the fairy tale of a divine, but still industrious, ocean. The two realms, both industrious, are demarcated by a binary that serves to separate, rather than conflate, conceptions of the world in *The Water-Babies*: a binary between the soot of chimney-sweeping and the clarifying, moralizing water titular to the text. However, this binary opposition is used throughout the text to establish that

water, a component of the natural world, is a moral as well as physical cleanser. By vilifying the social ills of man—here, child labor—while simultaneously glorifying the importance of nature in curing these ills, Kingsley overlays the interests of society with those of the environment.

Kingsley does not illustrate the horror of being a young chimney-sweep through the physical dangers it posed to children. Instead, *The Water-Babies* paints chimney-sweeping as dark by placing it in the heart of its antithesis: a clean, white, well-kept and well-loved girl, Ellie, whose room is blessed with washing materials and images of Christ blessing those babes that have mothers enough to bring them to religion (*WB* 16). The reader also appreciates chimney-sweeping as a form of hell: in order to redeem himself through charitable good works, Tom must locate his old master Grimes and forgive the man for the wrongs and abuses he subjected the child to while Tom was under Grime's care and employ. Tom finds Grimes caught in the 345th chimney of his punishment; the man is made to serving out his otherworldly repentance via the very labor that was meanwhile being unfairly inflicted upon real-world Victorian children, a point which the text takes pains to make clear via a conversation between Grimes and Mrs.

Bedonebyasyoudid:

“Did I ask to be brought here into the prison? Did I ask to be set to sweep your foul chimneys? Did I ask to have lighted straw placed under me to make me go up? . . . Did I ask to stay here—I don't know how long . . . and never get my pipe, nor my beer, nor anything fit for a beast, let alone a man?”

“No,” answered a solemn voice behind. “No more did Tom, when you behaved to him in that very same way.” (172)

Though Grimes begins his dialogue by addressing Tom, he pointedly addresses the reader when he asks if it is fair that he has been sent to clean “your” chimneys, drawing in the audience as complicit with the sin of child labor—provided, of course, that they had employed a child chimney-sweep.

When it comes to descriptions of Tom engaged in the pain and suffering of chimney-sweeping, however, the reader is treated to only a sentence on the first page:

He cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw; and when the soot got into his eyes, which it did every day in the week; and when his master beat him, which he did every day in the week; and when he had not enough to eat, which happened every day in the week likewise. (*WB* 5)

Douglas-Fairhurst argues that the nature of Tom’s hardship as a chimney-sweep is given only this sentence, creating a disconnect between the gravity of child labor, evidenced by the political change catalyzed in part by *The Water-Babies*, and the flippant focus of the text itself. While Douglas-Fairhurst overlooks both Tom’s scene in Ellie’s room and Grimes’ punishment as implicit indictments of the trade, his arguments stand. The soot of Tom’s labors is more important as a metaphor than a physical or medical reality, and the social issues that underlie the text as a whole are treated more with imagination than sobering realism (Douglas-Fairhurst xxv). It is appropriate, actually, that the real, social issue of unsanitary and unsafe working conditions for children fails to be treated with realism in the novel. Kingsley does not use concrete details to add power to his narrative,

instead relying on fantasy and whimsy to carry the reader through. Much like Tom's own fickle nature, smiling one moment and crying the next, the reader is made to ride uneven waves between the socially-grounded and the fantastic. The urgency of the social problems presented in *The Water-Babies* is subsequently under threat of dilution in the fantastic manner in which the text is written. "Perhaps," Lam argues, "the most fantastical element of Kingsley's fairy tale, written at the height of the Industrial Revolution in England, is its portrayal of the happily employed water babies who clean rock-pools and plant cockles," engaging in the simultaneous labor of gardening and cleaning the stains of mankind. Nevertheless, the fact remains that *The Water-Babies* provided the final push of public interest required to pass the Chimney Sweeper's Regulation Act of 1864, an act that finally gave teeth for enforcement of the 1840 act of the same name outlawing workers under twenty-one to the employment of children ten years or younger as chimney-sweeps (*Abridgement of Statutes* 62). Social change emerged from *The Water-Babies*, carried not in terms of lived experience or factual investigation but instead through the fictional, whimsical, and fairy tale.

According to Hillard, the purpose of a Victorian fairy tale is to provide a narrative for the archaic against which the narrative of the modern might be built in opposition. *The Water-Babies* fulfills this paradigm by constructing the world of the industrialized present against the clean and natural realm of the oceans, though in this case the modern age is not given preference. The city and its soot pollute not only to the body but to the soul of society, and Tom, a child of the city and the symbolic future of England, is the proof of both the potency of water and the problems of the industrial landscape. As a fledgling stalwart Englishman, Tom stands "manfully" against the injustices of his life:

“chimney-sweeping, and being hungry, and being beaten” (*WB* 6). The reader’s applause for Tom’s natural manliness is dependent upon the horror of the crimes against him, which are not only that he endures hardship but that this hardship is “the way of the world, like rain and snow and thunder” to him, with child labor and abuse taking root as Tom’s understanding of the natural order (6). Tom’s christening in the machinations of the sooty city keep him, initially, ignorant of both the workings of the natural world and of divine order.

As in Browning’s “The Cry of the Children,” part of the inhumanity of a child laborer’s life is that they are ignorant of Christian goodness and “know no other words, except ‘Our Father’” with which to pray (154). Tom’s religious education is even more disastrous than these children of Browning’s for he “had never heard of God, or of Christ, except in words which you never have heard” (*WB* 5). Not only has Tom not heard as much as an “Our Father,” the exposure he has had to the words “God” and “Christ” themselves were, as the narrator implies, profanations, likely from the mouth of Grimes. As such, the profanation of the sacred is another form of dirt that Tom must wash from him, a washing performed simultaneously with the curing of his ignorance of the nature and morality.

Cleanliness and morality thus come through avenues of language as well as water—significant since Kingsley is, after all, using language as the conduit of knowledge and revelation. By chapter three, Tom “was clean,” meaning that even his memories of chimneys, beatings, and darkness were gone, and “best of all, he had forgotten all the bad words which he had learned from Grimes” (47). However, in the following chapter, Tom hears poachers approach the water, one among them Grimes:

“there were shouts, and blows, and words which Tom recollected to have heard before; and he shuddered and turned sick at them now, for he felt somehow that they were strange, and ugly, and wrong, and horrible” (69). The profanity and violence are the things that mark mankind as distinct from Tom’s new and harmonious aquatic home, and Tom recollects that these are humans, which he considers “savage,” “dirty,” and “foul” compared to his own identity as a water-baby (69-70). This moment serves to remind Tom of the human world he had forgotten and see it through the eyes of a creature of nature, beginning Tom’s arc of individuation that eventually merges his aquatic and human selves to a morally-sound being—in essence, erasing the separation between “water” and “baby” to produce a worthwhile adult. As such a turning point in the text, it carries a message vital to that individuation: man is capable of being both foul and fair, profane and pious, but water and nature are only ever the locus of the clean and divine.

### **Morality and Mortality**

Deep ecology, however, is not the only modern theory of environmentalism that applies to *The Water-Babies*. Though deep ecology excellently collapses binaries between human and environmental needs, Garrard argues that postequilibrium ecology is the ecological theory best suited to carry the weight of effecting real-world change primarily because it goes one step further than deep ecology in disillusioning itself from ideal forms of nature. Postequilibrium ecology, according to Garrard, casts aside the traditional pastoral conception of a single, “supposedly authentic or pristine state of nature” which humanity should strive to achieve or restore (65). Instead, postequilibrium ecology recognizes change as a necessary and desirable component in the environment and calls on human principles to discriminate between what changes are most responsible

to the larger system of man and nature (65, 79). This seems somewhat at-odds with the beautifully symmetrical and holistic nature that Kingsley crafts, wherein Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid says of her counterpart, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, “she begins where I end, and I begin where she ends” (*WB* 170). However, postequilibrium ecology does not necessarily posit that nature is a realm of chaos. Instead, as Daniel Botkin suggests, “nature undisturbed is not constant in form, structure, or proportion, but changes at every scale of time and space” (qtd. in Garrard 65). Botkin proposes an ecological perspective that does not valorize a balance achieved but, instead, a balance endeavored.

The perpetual labor of nature is, perhaps, the most poignant parallel to so modern a theorization as postequilibrium ecology that *The Water-Babies* makes. In an era that has moved beyond the Industrial Revolution, the fairy tale’s stress on mechanical persistence and continual industry work well toward a narrative of an ever-working natural world. Endowing both Tom, who comes to stand for a compassionate humanity, and Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, a stern environment, with immortality seems Kingsley’s way of implying the endless endeavor that is man’s relationship with nature. Where immortality was accessible only through fairy tales, Kingsley himself committed to a perpetual commitment to a divine nature as best he knew how: in death. Pope-Hennessy suggests that Kingsley felt his own life on the mortal plane was something of a burden. “It was at the very early stage in his career,” Pope-Hennessy reports, “that he began to regard ‘a bed beneath the turf’ as the most desirable of all resting places” (8). His longing for an embracing, chthonic resting place is eventually fulfilled: following his death in the January of 1875, Kingsley’s remains enjoyed what is now termed a “green burial,” a

burial wherein the body was interred without a coffin so that it would not be barred from efficient reintegration into the soil (Hamlin). Reverend Kingsley, then, practiced what he preached: the continuum between the human form and the green world around it, analogous for the communion between the human soul and the divine, was valorized by Kingsley to the end and beyond. Moreover, it is because man has the moral soul to connect to the divine that this green burial and death were, to Kingsley, so paramount: as Douglas-Fairhurst points out, Kingsley wondered “whether man might undergo ‘much more wonderful’ changes than other animals” (xxxv). While both animal and man are biological entities entrenched in the sublime environment, only the Toms of the world—having the benefit of an immortal soul—may use incorporation into that environment to achieve a moral, spiritual divinity.

But what is seen by Pope-Hennessy as disconnection from the world “[i]n spite of his embracing love of nature in all her moods and metamorphoses,” replaced instead by “no love of living for its own sake,” may yet be an extension of that love of nature Kingsley elsewhere expresses in cheerier terms (8). Tom’s mishap with a stream is not a death or drowning, after all, but a return to the divinity of nature: Tom’s temporary “grave” is more watery but no less immersive than the turf Kingsley spoke of with longing. The text of *The Water-Babies* nevertheless makes it clear that this is not a death for Tom, but a rejuvenation. Tom is so far from death, in fact, that his moment of death and rebirth is not presented in such fatal terms: while the adults of the novel lament Tom’s death, the narrator does not even entertain death as a possibility, “for of course he work” (36). Termination does not suit the buoyant levity of the story nor its message of moral, natural, and personal evolution. Evolution must be a developmental process, and

the economy of nature must be self-perpetuating and self-sustaining. The labor engaged in under the waves by the fairy beings is “green” by modern standards of sustainability and suitable in the oceanic utopia for children where chimney-sweeping above-ground was not. This double-standard of appropriate, fairy world labor and inappropriate, industrial real-world labor for children, however, may very well have been lost on the children for whom this issue was, potentially, a very pressing reality. The death that is unthinkable for Tom was real for others, and while some children who would have so labored may have found comfort in such a tale, it is uncertain if they should have had access to it. Meanwhile, those who have the power to alter the children’s situation are in fact the legislative adults of the country for whom such a book was not, ostensibly, intended. Overall, as Bratton points out, the books and subsequent child readership of the nineteenth century “respond very closely . . . to the varieties and changes in educational provision throughout the century,” meaning that the facts of Victorian society cannot be dismissed in the formation of its books (13). If this book is a radically “green” work, then, the question remains: how can this radicalism apply to the present day?

## Adaptations and Evolution

*The Water-Babies* is a landmark piece in the history of Western children's literature, making the text important not only—through Kingsley—to history but also to literary history in and of its own merit. Nevertheless, while its place in the canon of Victorian or even children's literature is contested, *The Water-Babies'* place in the publishing house seems secure. Reprints of and various illustration sets for the book abound, but what is particularly of interest are the ways that the text has been altered, amended, or subtracted from in order to perpetuate the work into the future. Abridgements, somewhat ironically, are popular because they censor the parts of Kingsley's story that seem distasteful and unethical by modern standards. Adaptations to other mediums, on the other hand, typically alter the format of the text without updating the relevance of its content: *The Water-Babies'* reproduction since its original Victorian print has been driven not by the cultural relevance of the text's content but, instead, by a cultural nostalgia that is easily commodified. Nevertheless, adaptations such as Paul Farley's 2013 BBC Radio 4 rewrite prove that, as always, these two things do not need to be mutually exclusive. Most importantly, Farley's key alterations in his radio adaptation reveal that those aspects of *The Water-Babies* that most prevent the book's inclusion in the canon—or even in the nursery bookshelf—can be overcome by adapting the text according to the logic of conjoined opposites. These aspects are the very same that are removed from abridgements of the text: Kingsley's elaborate tangents and, more crucially, xenophobia.

To look at how the text is adaptable, it is beneficial to consider that *The Water-Babies* is itself a sort of “adaptation” of *The Origin of Species*, tailored to a specific

audience and recontextualized by Kingsley to relate to religion. More specifically, Kingsley framed *The Origin of Species* within his own ideological intent, one that encompasses not only the relationship between science and religion but also the broader ability to acknowledge connections between unlike things. Therefore, while *The Water-Babies* is certainly a narrative about a boy named Tom, it is also a collection of messages intended to persuade its readers into following a certain logic. These didactic manipulations are themselves altered from another treatise—*The Origin of Species*—and are perfectly vulnerable to further alterations. The subject of *The Origin of Species*, evolution, requires its own discussion of adaptation. The text, in publication as well as content, is mimetic to this theme. In other words, *The Water-Babies* in part acts out its own message.

Dichotomized terms overlay and even cohabitate with one another throughout *The Water-Babies*, as with the realistic and fantastic style of the text or the relationship between nature and man within the content of the narrative itself. *The Water-Babies* possesses the means of overcoming inflexible binaries through the emphasis on imaginative belief which emerges in the space where unlike terms overlap. The effect of this mutuality of terms is to produce a continuum between the terms where each may coexist inclusive of one another, hybridizing the terms and therefore expanding the realm of possibility just as imagination expands the realm of conception. The relationship between nature and technology in *The Water-Babies* is not a dualism, as technology is a potential expression of the same industry and imagination in man that is seen in the environment. Though the works of man and the works of nature are easily conceived of in opposition, their coexistence in Kingsley's text insists upon a fundamental correlation

between the environment and mankind. Since debates between anthropocentrism and environmentalism still continue in ecocritical debates, modern audiences have a great potential to benefit from an understanding of humanity and nature's mutuality.

Imagination allows the mind to elaborate upon what is already perceived and understood; where binaries inform ideologies, imagination is the tool for entertaining a non-dichotomized viewpoint.

However, *The Water-Babies* is not watertight. Kingsley meant to perpetuate ideals of open-mindedness and acceptance of previously unconsidered viewpoints and coexistences when it came to nature, science, God, and man. The unconventional hybridization of Evangelical didacticism and fantastic, fairy tale elements served as an appropriate house for the divine and the Darwinian. Beyond these stylistic and thematic combinations, the text is perfectly capable of and even invested in perpetuating staid binaries, especially when it comes to instances of racism and xenophobia in *The Water-Babies*. These places in the text are easily the greatest obstacles to *The Water-Babies*' incorporation into the modern canon as they do not adhere to modern standards of acceptability; the particular parochial views in the book also conspicuously date the text. For instance, in an offhand critique on the ongoing United States Civil War, the narrator explains that living in comfort may "sometimes make [people] naughty, as it has made the people in America," who themselves are like "horses overfed and underworked"<sup>11</sup> (114-15). Racial and xenophobic stereotypes are also included in the text with a

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<sup>11</sup> As Alderson notes, *The Water-Babies* was written during the time of the United States Civil War (1861-1865). The narrator alludes to the United States as a land of people who "waxed fat and kicked," referencing Deuteronomy 32:15, though Kingsley fails to explain the connection between complacency and civil unrest in the text (224).

frequency and off-handedness that imply the text's support of these offhand stereotypes as common sense or even common knowledge, as when an old cock-grouse found by Tom finds early in his adventures is described as "washing himself in sand, like an Arab," or even simply when Mother Carey's tale of Epimetheus ends with him becoming "rich as a Jew" (22, 150).

Moreover, the text operates under the assumption that the reader will readily accept the accuracy of the stereotypes it puts forth. The text explains the history of St. Brandan's fairy isle as a necessary separation of the "fairy" and "blest" realm of Christian goodness and the "wild" Irish heathens; the narrator establishes the wildness of the Irish—dichotomized against the holiness of the saint—by invoking components of Irish culture such as the pater o'pee, a traditional Irish dance, or the shillelagh and subsequently implying that these cultural practices are inherently flawed, perhaps simply by virtue of their Irishness (101). The narrator claims that those Irish who failed to listen to the gospel and continue their wildness unchecked were "changed into gorillas, and gorillas they are until this day" (101). Telling the reader that wild, irreligious people transform into gorillas becomes Kingsley's way of manipulating Darwin's message of evolution to accommodate his moral message. Kingsley constructs the biological development from ape to human as an arc that advances toward an ever-higher form because, according to his religious understanding of Darwin, nobler bodies are those given direct support by the surrounding environment via the reward of continued survival. Because, for Kingsley, nature is divinely-sourced, nature's support of man's development can be construed as a support of moral betterment; on the other hand, poor

moral choice or the inability to commune properly with nature become indicators of a lowliness that is equally reflective of a species' evolutionary choices.

These didactic messages that threaten a backwards physical and moral evolution is expressed in the main plot through the ever-present threat that looms over Tom: misbehave and your immoral actions will turn you into an ape. Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid uses the horror of man-to-beast transformation as the punchline of the tale of the Doasyoulikes, people whose laziness and stupidity transforms them over generations into apes. The greater message is that, as Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid says, that ““there are two sides to every question, and a downhill as well as an uphill road; and, if I can turn beasts into men, I can, by the same laws of circumstance, and selection, and competition, turn men into beasts”” (129). Though the fairy alludes to Darwin's theory by mentioning laws of competition and selection, this additional detail—that the rules of evolution work both ways, both up- and downhill, seems especially tailored to justifying discrimination of the subaltern based on their perceived animalism. Though the tale of the Doasyoulikes is meant by its teller to apply to all humans, it is used as a warning issued simultaneously against Tom's humanity and Englishness, as though the two are synonymous: Tom is told that he was nearly transformed into a beast during his travels but, because he has deigned to take responsibility for his actions, ““like an Englishman,”” he is spared the fate of remaining a lowly ““eft in a pond”” (129). Moreover, Bedonebyasyoudid includes the detail that the Doasyoulikes are unable to defend their humanity because of a language barrier, for when Paul Belloni Du Chaillu approaches one with a gun, the creature tries to cry out, ““Am I not a man and a brother?”” but instead can only call ““Ubboboo!”” (128). In the good fairy's moral tale, therefore, English is both the state of humanity that Tom—

and any boy, it is implied—should strive for and the language that is somehow inherent in humanity to the extent that its loss marks the loss of a justifiable humanity.

The racial undertones of the story are further verified by the presence of Du Chaillu, a French-American explorer whose descriptions of Africa—and particularly of its violent gorillas—inspired the 1861 Christmas annual of *Punch* to adopt the theme of gorillas (210; “Paul du Chaillu”). Africa, it seems, must be present in the narrative of evolution not as the locus of life’s origins but instead as the habitation of evolution’s possible failures. In order to urge Tom’s moral evolution toward the eventual English adult who invents firearms and locomotives according to the industrial logic of a divinely ordered world, the foreign Other must exist as the contrary de-evolution that instructs the reader through its bad example. It is unfortunate that *The Water-Babies* uses a binary opposition to support its arguments at all, but because the book animalizes and Others the devolved human as one-dimensional portraits of African or Irish people, Kingsley’s message of moral and spiritual evolution becomes implicated in the racist and xenophobic arguments it uses as support. Kingsley’s thesis that the soul makes the body like a snail makes its shell, used as justification for discrimination, is therefore no longer agreeable in a text by modern standards. Kingsley does not question these reductionist readings of the Other because this stereotypical rendering of the bestial, apelike, and lazy creature against the morally laudable Englishman is both justifiable in and useful to Kingsley’s narrative. As with the story of the Doasyoulikes, or even brief asides that “poor ould Ireland does not prosper like England and Scotland” because the Irish are dishonest, Kingsley uses the “evidence” of racial typecasts as foundations for his arguments (*WB* 62).

It would be easy to dismiss Kingsley's racial stereotyping as an inevitable consequence of writing as a white man in a time and culture that readily propagated the Othering of nonwhite races. However, this logic is dismissive of Kingsley's radical thinking on any other front: if he is capable of sympathizing with the working class, integrating evolution into his religious doctrine, or even adamantly detesting slavery (Douglas-Fairhurst xxii), why should he be incapable of questioning stereotypes and dichotomies of race? Kingsley, after all, was actively seeking to influence his readers to accept and embrace a certain unorthodox but open-minded ideology. Granting Kingsley both his writerly autonomy and the influence of the period during which he lived and wrote, a reader must recognize that Kingsley's ideology of coexisting opposites and hybridized binaries unfortunately crumbles when faced with the racial discourse of his day and, even, his own theorizations. Hamlin suggests that the particular racism Kingsley espouses is formed from the logic he produces to explain evolution, religion, and his own conception of morality. Hamlin argues that while Kingsley was preparing fertile soil for ecocritical readings by complicating and combining otherwise simplified dualities of art and science, of imagination and fact, and even of scholarship and manual labor, he was nevertheless constructing a structure of thought that blames race and poverty on personal moral choice. He not only wrote on the "Englishman" and "foreigner" or "savage" as though they are distinct, he argued these two strains of mankind would inevitably diverge, separating rather than comingling this duality (Douglas-Fairhurst xxii).

Moreover, Kingsley's xenophobia is an extension of the writerly sloppiness that serves as his other weakness. Critics often treat these two flaws in Kingsley's work as separate issues, but the work's thematic inconsistencies are a result of Kingsley's refusal

to work through his own reasoning. Such inconsistencies include Kingsley's feeling that children have great potential for faith because of their purity of insight and imagination while Kingsley himself suffers from the immaturity of arguments gleaned from reactionary feeling instead of contemplative meditation. This is referring to Kingsley's scattered writing style but, most importantly, to how the xenophobia and backward-evolution in *WB* is the shortsighted flaw of the novel's themes of faith, mutuality rather than binaries, and imagination. Kingsley fails to fulfill the logic of an ideology of deconstructed binaries because Kingsley nevertheless kept binaries in place.

Why would Kingsley write so inconsistently or uphold concepts of race and nationhood that reduce subjects to binary terms of good and bad? It is easy to say that he lived in a time when discourses of the savage Other versus the English self were implicit throughout Victorian society and therefore that Kingsley was a victim of the ideas of his time. However, Christopher Hamlin argues that Kingsley's xenophobia is an extension of his worldview. Both Darwin and Kingsley, Hamlin points out, recognize the conflict between individual and communal welfare as the opportunity for moral betterment, an evolution toward a higher plane—somewhat analogous to the ecocritical conflict between the interests of the environment and of mankind (Hamlin 264). However, where Darwin “stressed the relations of kinship and felt obligation,” Kingsley felt that one's duty to the common good could be demarcated throughout hierarchies according to gender, race, nation, class, or species (264). As the laws of nature are imbued, for Kingsley, with the divine law that formed it, the moral implications of divine reward emerge in the system of natural selection, meaning that Kingsley's conception of moral evolution and reward are applicable to humanity at large, as if in a form of proto-social Darwinism.

The social implications of moral evolution are visible in *The Water-Babies*, where moral goodness does not only determine the racial or bestial nature of a man but also, possibly, their socioeconomic status; Tom is, after all, raised from the station of a belabored chimney-sweep to that of an engineer of modern technologies over the course of the book. Though *The Water-Babies* cast chimney-sweeping and child labor as a horror to the extent that legal change was enacted to protect the rights of children, the work seems to incriminate bad behavior rather than poor legislature as the cause of child labor. As he is about to set out on his quest to forgive his old master, Tom reveals that he fears that Grimes will turn him back into a chimney-sweep and that this is ““what I have been afraid of all along”” (122). Ellie, acting as the moral voice, reminds Tom that ““Nobody can turn water-babies into sweeps, or hurt them at all, as long as they are good”” (122). Kingsley attributes the right to inhabit a privileged positions to inner, moral goodness, implying that water-babies’ punishment and harm comes to them in proportion to the child’s own deserving. If the soul makes the body as a snail makes his shell, then the Othering of bodies is justified on the grounds that any perceived inferiorities are expressions of an inner inferiority. The great threat that this logic poses in *The Water-Babies* is that even little English boys like Tom can slip into apelike laziness or sooty blackness if only their soul degrades appropriately; the threat it poses to real-world children is that a child’s safety and success correlate directly to their good behavior and good work, as though every Grimes is locked away and appropriately punished.

Hamlin’s argument is sound, but his reading of Kingsley’s racially biased ideology is an investigation and a conclusion of the man’s life and texts that is unconcerned with a “solution.” His analysis, in other words, is applicable to scholars, not

to children. While it is unnecessary to entirely censor Kingsley's racism from modern readers through the same abridgements that snip out *The Water-Babies'* more lengthy or frivolous asides, the unadapted text becomes a study in Kingsley's writing, his purpose, and his historic moment. As Stevenson argues, the work as-is is too intimately tied to the specificities of the past and the ardor of nostalgia to receive honest attention as a work of literature. *The Water-Babies'* ability to effect social change in a modern age as it sought to do in its own time period seems even more far-fetched. What, then, would be the path toward a more contemporarily pertinent and thematically coherent version of this story? As with any organism faced with change, the text must adapt in order to survive. Specifically, if the *The Water-Babies* is subject to the same creed that allows only the fittest to survive, its perpetuation into the future as a work in the canon or otherwise is dependent on its ability to adapt to fit its niche. Adaptations such as the 1978 animated film keep the text in the present by drawing on the appeal of *The Water-Babies* as a beloved title, continuing its survival in the niche of nostalgia.

These adaptations do not recontextualize the work's messages to suit the text's initial purpose: to influence public perception through imaginative possibility. Paul Farley's BBC adaptation of *The Water-Babies* fits the bill. Kingsley's racial binaries are rendered moot right away: in *The Water-Babies: A Modern Fairy Tale*, the good English boy, Tom, is replaced with Nigerian child laborer, Tomi, who was trafficked illegally into England. Tomi's plot follows the same arc as Tom's: he endures hardship, encounters the better-off Ellie, runs away from his misfortune, and falls into a river where he is transformed. Like Tom, Tomi encounters eels, lobster, and caddis flies, is integrated into the aquatic environment of fairy tale fantasy, meets the good fairies of moral

significance—Miss Whatgoesaroundcomesaround and Miss Whatcomesaroundgoesaround—and learns to balance his personal freedoms with responsible choice. Though the skeleton of the story is the same, altering *The Water-Babies*' plot in order to modernize the plight of children is a radical shift. In part because of the original publication of *The Water-Babies*, child labor laws exist in present-day England so that children are no longer exploited; however, as this adaptation's choice of occupation for its protagonist makes clear, that does not mean that child labor is no longer a relevant social issue.<sup>12</sup> In companion interviews for the radio serial, Farley contextualizes his adaptation in two ways. First, he mentions that he was sensitive to the nascent environmentalist messages of Kingsley's book in its original state as well as their implications for a modern audience ("Proto-conservationist"); second, Farley admits that he is uncertain of the text's popularity or presence in modern readership, especially for children ("Unforgettable Book"). *The Water-Babies: A Modern Fairy Tale* is only an hour long and inaccessible outside of the live broadcasting schedule of BBC 4, so it is in no way a replacement for the original text, but Farley's discussion implies that the radio serial was constructed to fulfill a specific niche.

In this way, Farley's adaptation plays to the narrative already present in *The Water-Babies* in order to alter the text, as an adaptation should, to fulfill a niche in its environment wherein it might survive. *The Water-Babies* is a text that was conceived and

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<sup>12</sup> The United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA) 2013 assessment of human trafficking lists Nigeria as the fifth most frequently recorded country of origin for trafficking victims; the assessment also specifies that women and children are particularly susceptible and that "forced labor or services [and] slavery or practices similar to slavery" are types of exploitation for those trafficked (NCA). Farley's modernized Tom is not only appropriate to the original text—it is also appropriate to present-day concerns.

constructed in the context of its time, tailored by Charles Kingsley to enact social change and to influence an audience of both children and adults to conceive of the world in broader terms than binaries of science or religion, man or nature. The social and cultural “ecosystem” of the 1860s has passed, however, so the survival of this fairy tale relies, in part, on its ability to adapt to the ever-changing demands of its new historical and literary environment. *The Water-Babies* as an unchanged text survives primarily as a fossil of nostalgia and historical relevance, but in order to again become a text that seeks to engage with its audience and social moment, the work must necessarily change.

However, as we have seen, *The Water-Babies* is constructed to welcome change. The book’s almost-unstable multiplicity of form and content, its emphasis on imagination, and its approach to the child audience as an asset of future social ideology, make the *The Water-Babies* malleable to variation and adaptation. When the work as a whole is viewed through a lens of overlapping opposites, even those moments where the text maintains rigid ideological structures, as with its xenophobic and racist language, cannot be maintained as consistent to the text. Most phenomenally, in opening itself up to all possibilities and proposing an ideology that exists in the space between collapsed binaries, *The Water-Babies* is not only able to adapt to perpetuate its relevance in literature and influence its readership into the indefinite future. *The Water-Babies* can also, through any further iterations, enact as a book the story of adaptation and evolution that Tom—and perhaps the reader through him—undergoes as a character. The space between reader and character, like the space between the evolution of the book and the evolution of its own narrative, collapses under the connections of imagination.

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