

**The Interstitial Body and Moral Formation:
Third-Culture Displacement and Subject Formation
in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies***

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In Charles Kingsley's children's book *The Water-Babies* (1863), the chimney sweep Tom, worn out after being chased across the English countryside and half delirious with thirst, tumbles into a stream and appears to drown. Tom, however, actually undergoes a remarkable transformation and becomes a "water baby"; the narrator describes Tom being perfectly at home in the water with his human body having changed into one that is "3.87902 inches long, and having round the parotid region of his fauces a set of external gills ...just like those of a sucking eft..." (Kingsley 1976, 78). Kingsley, thus, sets into motion a narrative which moves quickly from social issues, to theology, to evolution, to seemingly disparate notions of education – a narrative in which displacement and being "other" play key roles. As a chimney sweep, Tom does not find much happiness or nurture with his cruel master Grimes or dangerous job, and because of Tom's status as a sweep, he can easily be mistaken for

a thief or worse and hounded to his death, as the beginning of the narrative demonstrates. Although much happier as a water baby, Tom is now completely “other,” and he moves through stream, river, and ocean to find his true self. The final resolution for his displacement rests in a moral quest, and at its conclusion, Tom the chimney sweep makes his last transformation: he becomes an engineer.

Kingsley’s unusual treatment of Tom’s alterity has led to diverse critical positions. In an article entitled “Kingsley’s Debt to Darwin”, Arthur Johnston comments on the hodgepodge nature of the issues Charles Kingsley addresses in *The Water-Babies*. Johnston observes that “the genesis of the book lies in three of the topics most heatedly discussed in 1862: the employment of children, primary education and the examination system, and Darwinism” (1959, 216). While Johnston does point out the overlap between Kingsley’s religious beliefs and interest in scientific advances as his depiction of “the moral basis to physical evolution” (1959, 218), Johnston essentially sees child labor, education, and evolutionary theory as three distinct themes that Kingsley examines separately in the text. Critics frequently take the position that Johnston does: Kingsley included diverse themes in the book which revealed a broad range of interests, but were also distinct from each other.¹ More recently, Jessica Straley, Ruth Y. Jenkins, Jonathan Padley, and Christopher Hamlin offer readings that see the diverse aspects of *The Water-Babies* presenting a unified argument. Straley sees Kingsley using Herbert Spenser’s model of recapitulation, which unifies Kingsley’s ideas on evolution with some of his ideas on education, but sees Kingsley revising this model and Christianizing it. Jenkins uses

¹ John C. Hawley, for instance, looks at the didactic quality of *The Water-Babies* and argues that the book intends to catechize its audience, but he separates this element from Kingsley’s treatment of evolution. Hawley states: “Beyond the pleasant introduction to evolutionary theory that the novel offers, however, and serving as the rationale for the novelist’s placid acceptance of a teleology in nature, is what might be called the catechetics of Christian socialism” (Hawley 1989, 21).

Julia Kristeva's concept of the "abject" to understand Tom as a disruptive force against dominant cultural values, while Padley sees the various subtexts as consistently presenting Tom as marginalized. Hamlin, on the other hand, observes the strong environmental position taken throughout Kingsley's work. These readings demonstrate the complexity of Kingsley's discourse on these various issues and provide many insights to the text.

One element that repeatedly occurs amidst these readings, and which I believe is of great critical interest, is the concept of displacement and the interstitial body and space in which Tom morally forms. Padley, for instance, writes, "Tom's descent into the water moves him over the boundary between his world and a world of liminal otherness" (2009, 56), and Jenkins argues that the narrative "challenges stable identities and social interpretations of value and posits an alternative space where what was named abject is elevated" (2011, 73). Straley notes the force involved in Tom's dislocation; she writes that "Kingsley's fairytale wrenches the child from London and flings him back to a pre-human stage of morphological development" (2007, 593-4). I believe Kingsley's interest in displacement ties in with a discourse within which authors as diverse as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, William Thackeray, and Rudyard Kipling engaged. These writers use displacement to resolve various issues, and I find the concept of "third culture" useful in understanding this type of displacement. "Third culture" in social theory accounts for types of cultural displacement, typically where children growing up in a foreign land reside between the cultures of their parents and the host countries. Without unduly stretching the idea of this social theory, Tom's body clearly falls between human, animal, and the supernatural fairies. Tom occupies an interstitial space between all three categories, and this space – his displaced body – provides him "room" to form morally. Although Tom's body does look "pre-human" as Straley notes, his thoughts,

emotions, and personality are recognizably human, and I see Tom's physical body going *forward* in moral formation as it sheds its sooty skin, not *backward* in development. The interstitial body also escapes the binary that Jenkins posits to offer a more nuanced understanding of social formations. The interstitial body demonstrates *where* the human, the animal, and the divine can interact – the biological, moral being of the water baby can have direct communion with the divine.

If, however, Tom the water-baby is the only instance of “interstitiality” in the story, then the third-culture model becomes no more than an amusing metaphor to explain the ambiguity of his form. I propose that the third-culture model identifies *where* moral formation occurs; the spatial locality of Tom's body is one such instance, as are the supernatural fairies and the natural world itself, particularly the ocean. Applying this theory to the text not only accounts for the displacement (both biological and spiritual) that Kingsley structures into the story, but also shows how Kingsley's interest in moral formation becomes pedagogical. Moreover, while the model reveals the unity of different elements that Kingsley incorporates into his idea of moral formation, the model also throws into relief the discrepancies and discordant notes that creep into what Kingsley tries to present as a harmonious whole. Understanding Tom as a third-culture subject also aligns Kingsley with one of the most unlikely of his contemporaries – Cardinal John Henry Newman. To better explicate this position, I will first look at the concept of third culture in social theory, next examine Newman's concept of moral formation, and then read *The Water Babies* in these contexts.

Third-Culture Displacement and the Third-Culture Subject

“Third culture,” at first, referred to the space people in expatriate situations used for cultural exchange. In “Work Patterns of Americans in India”, John Useem uses the

terms “first” and “second” culture to represent Indians and Americans, and the “third culture” represents interactions “created, shared, and learned by men of the two different societies...in the process of linking their societies...to each other” (1966, 147). Useem argues that the third culture indicated a shift in power from “super-subordination” to “co-ordination” (1966, 147). The importance of Useem’s description of third culture lies in how it relates to space and power; the third culture is a necessary, mutual space that provides room for cultural interaction unavailable elsewhere. To this initial concept, Ruth Useem added the idea that the third culture “is changing culture, highly protean within a rather firm outline” (1966, 135). Building on the idea of equal power in the space between cultures, Ruth Useem introduces the concept of differing uses of power by individuals placed within particular third-culture spaces.

A significant development in this discourse occurred when Ruth Useem and Richard Downie began to discuss third culture as an interior state found within the individual, in this case the expatriate child. Expatriate children lived between the first culture of their parents and the second culture of the host country; the children’s displacement from both cultures resulted in an *interior* “third culture” (Useem and Downie 1976). One could argue that *all* children begin as third culture, residing in a liminal state before being acculturated by parents or other adults. Third-culture displacement, however, adds an extra dimension to a child’s liminal state, and this type of cultural displacement continues on into adulthood (Bonebright 2010; Walters 2009). David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken further explicate the strengths and weaknesses of this “culture between cultures” (Pollock and Van Reken 1999, 20). They and other theorists noted the difficulty in identifying “home” and a sense of belonging and the prevalence of a sense of being rootless and a “migratory instinct”

(McLachlan 2005, 15). Yet the concept also opens up the possibilities of a “portable home” and the strengths and the advantages of mobility.²

Ruth Useem, Pollock, and Van Reken began to account for more types of experience (outside expatriate experience) that could create third-culture displacement; the “protean” nature continued, while the third culture remained recognizable. I would like to further expand these theorists’ paradigm to account for situations of third culture within the confines of a *single* culture. Repeatedly in British fiction leading up to Kingsley, authors such as Austen, Brontë, Dickens, and Thackeray create displaced characters similar to the third-culture model. Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Thackeray’s *Becky Sharpe*, for instance, face issues of place, identity, “belonging,” and “home” much as Tom does. The third-culture model, consequently, accounts for disparate cultural variance both within monocultures and between cultures.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that theory should “think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and...focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1994, 2) and that “these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (1994, 2). The interior displacement seen in the third-culture individual certainly displays a location and site that reveals cultural formation, mobility, alterity, and agency, but this subject formation does not necessarily propagate itself. Like the third-culture child who does not fit neatly into either the binary of the parent culture

² Pollock and Van Reken observe: “For some TCKS, however, ‘Where is home?’ is the hardest question of all. *Home* connotes an emotional place—somewhere you truly belong. There simply is no real answer to that question for many TCKs” (1999, 124).

or host culture, the interstitial space does not represent the meeting of binaries but of differing forms of power. This new model of power and space accounts better for Tom's displacement. Applying the third-culture model to *The Water-Babies* not only throws into relief the displacement that Kingsley incorporates into the narrative to create moral formation, but the third-culture model also shows how the internalization, the acculturation, of moral values produces and reorders social formations.

John Henry Newman and Moral Formation

When Cardinal John Henry Newman began to write about education, he too was considering displacement – the displacement of the Catholic mind. In 1852, under the direction of the Catholic Church, Newman began working in Ireland to establish a Catholic university. This endeavor intended to create an educational institution for Catholics equal to Oxford and Cambridge. Newman, who began his religious vocation as an Anglican priest and active member of the Oxford Movement before his conversion to Catholicism in 1845, had the needed experience to undertake this enterprise and also understood the strong contrast between education available to Protestants and Catholics. Newman's ideas on education range through several of his works, *The Idea of a University* (1852), *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), and under the titles *Historical Sketches*, *The Rise and Progress of Universities* (1872), and *Benedictine Essays* (1872). Throughout his writings on education, Newman struck a delicate balance between the idea/notional/abstract and image/real/living, with the idea and the image each richly developing the other.

Newman's "idea" of a university demonstrates a sweeping vision of knowledge and its uses. In "What is a University?", Newman writes, "it is a school of knowledge of every kind, consisting of teachers and learners from every quarter....in

its essence, a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse, through a wide extent of country” (2001, 6). To this criteria of diverse and abundant knowledge, Newman adds the aspect of a thriving and vibrant discourse among the academic community of professors and students; he writes, “it is in such assemblages and congregations of intellect that books themselves, the masterpieces of human genius, are written, or at least originated” (2001, 9). In keeping with the vitality of knowledge and discourse, in *The Idea of a University*, Newman advocates an expansiveness of intellectual understanding as the goal; he writes, “true enlargement of mind ... is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence” (1947, 121). Newman further elaborates that “possessed of this real illumination, the mind never views any part of the extended subject-matter of knowledge without recollecting that it is but a part, or without the associations which spring from this recollection” (1947, 121). Newman envisioned a liberal education to be dynamic and comprehensive, generated by the academic community through excellence in discourse.

While Newman keeps secular knowledge separate from Christian faith (“knowledge is its own reward”; Newman 1947, 159), he sees the university being complemented by the college which adds a moral component. Newman states:

the University is for theology, law, and medicine, for natural history, the physical science, and for the sciences generally and their promulgation; the College is for the formation of character, intellectual and moral, for the cultivation of the mind, for the improvement of the individual... (2001, 228-9).

This complementary nature of university and college clearly places intellectual formation in tandem with moral formation, but even Newman’s understanding of “illumination of the mind” while secular in the context of the university still has

religious overtones. Newman firmly believed that “reason rightly exercised, leads the mind to the Catholic Faith” (1947, 161) but he also points out that reason is independent of theology and therefore can frequently take its own course. In the context of this independence, Newman states, “nature pursues its course, now coincident with that of grace, now parallel to it, now across, now divergent, now counter, in proportion to its own imperfection and to the attraction and influence which grace exerts over it” (1947, 161). From the Catholic standpoint, Newman sees knowledge as one more tool that God provides for his people. The advantage that Newman sees for the Catholic mind to develop “intellectual cultivation” is that it can provide the individual struggling with sin to make the better choice; intellectual cultivation becomes, in Newman’s terms, a weapon against the enemy (1947, 164-5).

Interestingly, Newman also celebrates a different state of intellectual cultivation, one in which reason has less emphasis and a poetical understanding takes a higher role. Newman understands educational history in terms of Christian history; consequently, he views the Benedictines representing the ancient intellect and exemplifying poetical understanding. Newman aligns scientific knowledge with unity, comprehension, mastery and superiority (1947, 386); whereas, the poetical understands the world around it as “vast, immeasurable, impenetrable, inscrutable, mysterious,” and “does not address the reason, but the imagination and affections; it leads to admiration, enthusiasm, devotion, love” (1947, 387). Newman associates poetry with the child “because he knows so little” and reason and facts with an old man who knows much (1947, 387). This appreciation of the incomprehensible and the mysterious is consistent with Newman’s vision of the expansiveness of knowledge and discourse available at the university for intellectual cultivation.

Initially, the dissimilarities between Kingsley and Newman seem overwhelming. Kingsley, intensely critical of the Oxford Movement, viewed

Newman's conversion as religious betrayal. Kingsley's anti-Catholicism and personal antagonism toward Newman have been well documented, and Kingsley's own Christian socialism, with its emphasis on the physical (as opposed to Newman's focus on the intellectual), seems to place the two clergymen in even more oppositional positions. In the context of moral formation, however, Kingsley and Newman display overlapping interests. Both Kingsley and Newman, for instance, view divine authority as supreme, and do not see secular knowledge, while distinct from religious knowledge, as inherently opposed to Christianity. Kingsley and Newman value all knowledge highly; Kingsley was interested in the natural world and scientific advances, while Newman weighted philosophy and literature. Newman's understanding that secular knowledge (reason), if "rightly exercised," should lead to faith is very similar to Kingsley's stance that the natural world, if correctly appreciated, should lead the individual to God. Similarly, at the surface level, their educational methods seem to differ; Kingsley's "muscular" Christianity follows Arnold's educational philosophy with rugged outdoor play, while Newman's pursuit of the illumination of the mind appears to focus only on the intellectual. However, both Kingsley and Newman write against a type of rote memorization that produces a body of knowledge but no active use of it (Kingsley 1976, 336-42; Newman 1947, 113-4), and Tom's final moral development in *The Water-Babies* reveals aspects that are congruent with Newman's illumination of the mind. Finally, both Newman and Kingsley value and celebrate a childlike wonder of the incomprehensible and the mysterious.

The Interstitial Body and Moral Formation

In keeping with Kingsley's interest in science and nature, secular knowledge (which Kingsley and Newman view as unthreatening to religious faith) threads its way

throughout the narrative of *The Water Babies*. Much of this knowledge displays wonder at the mechanics and mysteries of the natural world, much akin to Newman's praise of the poetical understanding of the Benedictines. The narrator's first descriptions of Tom, the chimney sweep, show him as bright, alert, and full of curiosity about the world around him. About to throw a brick at a stranger on a horse, Tom immediately controls himself once he realizes that the stranger is in fact a customer; the narrator states: "Tom was a good man of business, and always civil to customers, so he put the half-brick down quietly behind the wall, and proceeded to take orders" (Kingsley 1976, 6). This observational acuity that Tom displays in interacting with the world around him appears again when he is on the road to Harthover Place with Grimes to clean the chimneys. Kingsley depicts a contrast between Tom's and Grimes's relationship to the natural world when they come across a cave: "Tom was wondering whether anything lived in that dark cave, and came out at night to fly in the meadows. But Grimes was not wondering at all" (1976, 15). This ability to "wonder," or the lack of it, depicts Tom as sensitive to the beauties of nature and willing to be guided by the Irishwoman in learning to appreciate and enjoy his surroundings. Grimes, on the other hand, refuses guidance and so remains oblivious to the greater part of his surroundings. The quality of observation and wonder that Tom displays as a chimney sweep continues when he is a water-baby. Tom observes various creatures when he is in the quieter waters of the stream, such as the caddis, trout, dragonfly, and otter. This disposition to be inquisitive and to acquire knowledge, however, also indicates the qualities of a scientist; when Tom has won his laurels and become a scientist, the narrator states that Tom now "knows everything about everything, except why a hen's egg don't [sic] turn into a crocodile, and two or three other little things..." (Kingsley 1976, 367). Whether sweep, water-baby, or scientist, Tom possesses knowledge and shows a consistent willingness to

learn more. Certainly this pursuit of knowledge that Kingsley depicts is in keeping with Newman's understanding of the expansiveness of knowledge.

Understanding Tom as an interstitial subject accounts for these instances in the text that show the similarities Tom retains through the different stages his body takes. The interplay of "cultures" shows that Tom cannot be reduced to any single state at any stage of his moral formation. Kingsley's portrayal of Tom refuses to fit into any binary paradigm that categorizes Tom as monolithic. Even when Tom is at the most "other" as a water-baby, Kingsley shows links between Tom the sweep and Tom the scientist; their physical states in respect to knowledge and learning are virtually the same. The difference between sweep and scientist is the added moral component that Tom gains when he occupies the state of a water-baby. While Kingsley initially states that Tom has "forgotten" his life as a sweep and his bad behavior, there are still traces of Tom the sweep in Tom the water-baby. For instance, Tom teases animals both as a chimney sweep and water-baby, and while on land, this behavior translates into his moral impurity; in his aqueous environment, this teasing alienates him from the animals. While Tom's displacement and interstitial qualities point to *where* a resolution occurs to transform a sweep into a scientist (moral formation), it also shows that the sweep and the scientist are not that far apart. The desire to learn which occurs in all three stages of Tom's metamorphosis not only ties in the physicality of the sweep and the scientist and child labor to evolutionary theory, but also brings in the theme of education.

While Tom possesses knowledge and the ability to learn as a sweep, he does not experience the types of education that Kingsley depicts as valuable, either on a secular or religious basis. For instance, with respect to secular learning, the narrator, when first introducing Tom, informs the reader that Tom cannot read or write (Kingsley 1976, 3). With regards to spiritual formation, Tom "had never been taught

to say his prayers. He never had heard of God, or of Christ, except in words which you never have heard, and which it would have been well if he had never heard” (Kingsley 1976, 4). To correct this paucity of secular and moral learning, Kingsley shows direct intervention of the Christian Godhead, in this instance represented by a mysterious Irishwoman. The Irishwoman first appears when Tom and Grimes make their way to Harthover Place. She creates within Tom a desire to be clean by talking to him about water and bathing. The Irishwoman describes to Tom how the sea “rolled and roared over the rocks in winter nights, and lay still in the bright summer days for the children to bathe and play in it” and tells him more stories “till Tom longed to go and see the sea, and bathe in it likewise” (Kingsley 1976, 14). What the Irishwoman accomplishes here is a form of education that incorporates both secular knowledge and moral knowledge. She points out the beauties and characteristics of the natural world (secular knowledge) and ties this knowledge in with the spiritual idea of cleansing and purification associated with both water and bathing. This use of the natural world to create a spiritual desire is consistent with Kingsley’s belief that the natural world leads people to understand God and in keeping with Newman’s model that knowledge can be the tool to lead the individual to God. This educational intervention of the Godhead continues when Tom becomes a water-baby; the supernatural figures of Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby teach Tom that there are both positive and negative consequences for his moral behavior. When Tom steals candy from Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, his body develops prickles. When he learns how to do something unpleasant but morally correct, as is the case when he sets out to help Grimes, Tom’s moral education becomes complete, and he can change into his final form of the scientist. Kingsley’s scientist embodies both forms of knowledge: secular and spiritual. In the same manner in which Kingsley showed similarities between Tom the sweep and Tom the

scientist in their ability to learn, Kingsley shows that both sweep and water baby need to be educated to achieve moral formation. While Kingsley uses the interstitial body to show where and how moral formation occurs, he shows the need for moral formation in all three “cultures” of sweep, water-baby, and scientist.

With this interconnection of physicality, spirituality, and education, Kingsley can implicitly offer recourse for issues such as child labor. The lack of moral formation in individuals such as Grimes and Tom leads to larger, abusive structures such as child labor; it is this state that Kingsley portrays at the story’s beginning. Education that includes moral instruction remedies such individuals and structures. Tom (who has forms of secular knowledge as both sweep and scientist) transforms from sweep to scientist because of spiritual formation; Kingsley shows that secular knowledge cannot accomplish this transformation by itself. The themes of child labor, education, religious faith, and evolution become intricately linked through Tom’s displacement and interstitial body. Tom evolves from chimney sweep to scientist because his education teaches him religious values; these moral values in turn instruct him in how to use the secular knowledge that he already has. Seemingly this moral and physical evolution then eradicates social structures that create abusive situations like children being used as chimney sweeps.³

The bodies of water that Kingsley treats as an interstitial home for the interstitial Tom—stream, river, and ocean—not only represent the English countryside, but point to other aspects of British culture as well. For instance, the ocean shows the new scientific interest in the natural world, and it also represents a public space, a

³ One aspect of Kingsley’s solution to the social issue of chimney sweeps remains problematic; chimneys still need to be swept. The ending of *The Water-Babies* leaves open the possibility that more science (in the form of technology) is the key, but it is the advance in technology that led to the need for chimney sweeps. This discrepancy is similar to the inconsistency seen in Kingsley’s portrayal of one figure of the Godhead as Irish.

space which Britain dominated with its navy, used heavily for commerce, and viewed as a prime location for both bodily and mental health and recreation. Public spaces inherently have interstitial qualities; whether street, market, beach, or ocean, they provide spaces in which different classes, genders, and races can meet and mingle. Tom's access to these bodies of water and his elevation to the status of a water baby (who is now clean and can learn how to be clean) put him on level with other classes of society. The water can contain the spectrum of class, from the haughty salmon and the beautiful dragonfly to the plebian trout and caddis; however, because it is a public domain and not a social structure, classes come into different forms of interaction than those dictated by a social code. On land, for instance, Tom has no direct access to either the squire or daughter of Harthover Place; Tom's appearance there is functional (to clean the chimneys), and he is relegated to the company of the other workers of the estate. In the sea, Tom has equal footing with all the creatures, even if some of them do think themselves superior to him, like the otter and the Gairfowl. Likewise, Tom and Ellie, in the ocean, remember their roles on land, but this memory has no impact on their behavior toward each other in the ocean; they are now equal. At the end of the book, for instance, Tom can go home with her as an equal; he is no longer the hired servant who cleans chimneys. Unlike some of his close contemporaries (notably Lewis Carroll), Kingsley does not display class anxiety within *The Water-Babies*: Tom moves up in social rank with ease. The very public, interstitial domain of the ocean creates room for this mobility.

A contrast that Kingsley places in the text to the unrestricted access of stream, river, and ocean is the restricted access Tom has to water as a chimney sweep. At the outset of the novel, the narrator informs the reader that Tom "never washed himself, for there was no water up the court where he lived" (Kingsley 1976, 3-4). Harthover Place, on the other hand, has an abundance of water; the grounds have streams, which

tempt Grimes to poach, and the house itself contains many sources of water. When Tom enters Ellie's bedroom, for instance, he sees "a washing-stand, with ewers and basins, and soap and brushes, and towels, and a large bath full of clean water—what a heap of things all for washing!" (Kingsley 1976, 29). In contrast to the plentitude of water available at Harthover, the only access that Tom does have to water comes in the form of the town pump. When Tom sees Grimes washing himself at a spring on the roadside, Tom yearningly comments, "I wish I might go and dip my head in...It must be as good as putting it under the town-pump; and there is no beadle here to drive a chap away" (Kingsley 1976, 15-6). The contrast between the wayside spring open to all and the town-pump monitored by the zealous beadle reveals the value of the public domain of the natural world; it becomes the great equalizer.

The very nature of the water, however, makes this public domain both vast and indefinable. If Tom's interstitial body as a water-baby proves to be amorphous and indeterminate, the water becomes equally nebulous; the boundaries between stream, river, and ocean shift and merge into each other, imprecise and changing. This public domain can provide comfort and succor, but also danger; Tom has dangerous interactions with some of the inhabitants of river and sea, and later Grimes drowns. The interstitial and constantly changing domain of the water shows the similarities between states; the trout and salmon are close kin, but the salmon look down on the trout for remaining in the stream and not venturing into the sea. The narrator observes for the reader: "For you must know, no enemies are so bitter against each other as those who are of the same race; and a salmon looks on a trout, as some great folks look on some little folks, as something just too much like himself to be tolerated" (Kingsley 1976, 143). This biological similarity which leads to intolerance in this instance is the same kind of similarity that Kingsley depicts in Tom the chimney sweep and Tom the scientist. However, either aspect of Tom can coexist

with the other inhabitants of the sea, the only caveat being that bad behavior leads to de-formation or a reverse evolution into a brute.

The religious connotations of water in the book also tie in with this concept of water as a public, interstitial domain. Apart from the general connotations of moral cleansing and purifying, Kingsley's use of water in the text has certain doctrinal implications. Critics such as Hawley and Brendon Rapple, for instance, note Tom's entry into the water as symbolic of the Christian concept of baptism; Kingsley tells us that Tom's old "husk" is washed away, and he takes a new and regenerated form as a water-baby. The Irishwoman makes it clear that the only condition to be clean is the desire to be clean, and once Tom evinces this desire, his entrance into the public domain of the water is ensured. Kingsley's use of water to represent both social equality and a religious inclusivity leads to a strange tension in a deterministic universe that values the individual highly. The initial chase scene in the story is a good example of this tension. Tom is mistaken for a thief and chased away from Harthover Place by the Irishwoman (who mysteriously appears behind and before Tom), the squire (who is the owner of the estate), Grimes, and every level of servant employed on the estate. Kingsley shows Tom's whole universe (from the Godhead to his temporal masters, both the squire, as a justice, and Grimes) hunting him down and guiding him toward the river. The Irishwoman at first follows Tom but then leads him toward the river even though he cannot see her. This aspect shows the importance of the individual subject, but also shows the subject governed by the moral and physical rules of the universe. Once Tom has made his choice to be clean, Kingsley shows that Tom voluntarily runs toward the river, but is also *chased* toward the river. The aspect of individuality in a deterministic universe becomes a constant refrain in the narrative. Kingsley gives choice due value in his evolutionary model; Grimes, unlike Tom, knows the difference in the states of being clean or dirty but *chooses* to remain

grimy. This choice creates his home in the courtyard. The balance between the individual and a deterministic universe remains poised throughout the narrative. Kingsley makes all the key choices in the text moral choices; these can in turn change and modify human behavior and forms, not only the individual's but also the behavior and forms of larger social formations.

The discourse that Newman sees as vital to the conception of a University occurs in many forms in *The Water Babies*. Tom's conversations with Grimes do not progress much, but with every other human and non-human that Tom subsequently interacts with, Kingsley structures in constant discourse. Tom actively learns through this discourse, and as Hawley and Straley point out, even the reader becomes engaged in this discourse. The richness of Tom's education shines through; his education does not lie in rote memorization or the filing away of facts, but rather, his knowledge becomes incorporated into his physical being. The comprehensive understanding that Newman sees as part of intellectual cultivation certainly occurs in Tom.

Kingsley's interest in education and moral formation, therefore, cover a wide range of issues. The third-culture model shows that through Tom's displacement, Kingsley is able to link these issues into a form of unity. However, the displacement that Kingsley interpolates repeatedly into the text also creates discrepancies. Kingsley's treatment of the Godhead is one such instance, particularly in his portrayal of the Irishwoman. In the chase scene, Kingsley shows that only the tall Irishwoman can keep up with Tom. The narrator comments on her ability to maintain pace with Tom by stating: "She had kept ahead of every one the whole time; and yet she neither walked nor ran. She went along quite smoothly and gracefully while her feet twinkled past each other so fast that you could not see which was foremost" (Kingsley 1976, 43). Kingsley's choice of adverbs, "smoothly" and "gracefully," and his description of her feet as "twinkling" create the image of her movements as rapid, flowing, and

undulating, and this type of movement foreshadows the strange Irishwoman's final destination and home – the river and sea. When the Irishwoman enters the river and transforms into the Queen of the fairies, Kingsley maintains the fluid nature of her movements; the narrator describes the change that occurs as, “her shawl and her petticoat floated off her, and the green water-weeds floated round her sides, and the white water-lilies floated round her head” (1976, 66). Her new apparel, water weeds and lilies that drift around her, reveal the mutability the Queen has in being able to change to fit in with her aqueous environs. The “green” of the water weeds, however, maintains a sense of her Irish identity, and the Irishwoman/fairy Queen remains close to and yet separate from her surroundings. On land, being Irish separates her from the other folk of the “great town in the North country” within which Kingsley situates the story (1976, 3), and as Queen of the fairies, this character takes on supernatural qualities that distinguish her from her natural environment. While these different elements make the character appropriately mysterious for the role she plays in the story, it also foreshadows discrepancies in Kingsley's depiction of the Irishwoman/Queen. The Irishwoman's separateness from the other characters and her environment at this point in the story introduces an element of displacement into the narrative.

The Irishwoman not only stands apart from the crowd physically, but Kingsley portrays her as “other” by the knowledge she has of those around her. The type of knowledge that interests the Irishwoman is moral in nature; for instance, she questions Grimes about his abandonment of his mother and his poaching. The narrator points out that she “seemed sad when [Tom] told her that he knew no prayers to say” (Kingsley 1976, 13), and she rebukes Grimes when he hits Tom. She also warns Tom and Grimes with reference to their actions and moral desires that “those that wish to be clean, clean they will be; and those that wish to be foul, foul they will

be” (Kingsley 1976, 17). When the Irishwoman returns to her aqueous kingdom, she tells the other fairies that Tom will soon be arriving as a water-baby and that “he is but a savage now, and like the beasts which perish; and from the beasts which perish, he must learn” (Kingsley 1976, 68). This “learning” which the Queen advocates incorporates both types of knowledge, knowledge about the natural world (“from the beasts which perish, he must learn”) and moral knowledge (indicated by Kingsley’s use of “savage” and “perish”). The fairy Queen’s alterity from her surroundings points the reader toward the space she occupies, and while it has the same interstitial qualities that Tom occupies as a water-baby, it signifies a different location into which he and the other characters cannot enter. The Irishwoman/Queen is not limited to one body or one environment and neither is the knowledge that she displays. Similarly, while she merges easily into river and sea, she and the other fairies stand apart from the animals that inhabit the sea and wield power over these creatures.

The Irishwoman’s liquid movements make their appearance again at the end of the narrative when Tom discovers that she is one and same with three other supernatural figures, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, and Mother Carey. Kingsley depicts Tom and another child, Ellie, standing in wonder before the supernatural figure which changes lithely from one form to another, and the narrator describes this transformation by stating: “And when they looked she was neither of them, and yet all of them at once” (Kingsley 1976, 367). Together these figures represent the Christian Godhead; the Irishwoman on land, for instance, displays knowledge about the other characters’ secretive actions, and she comforts and attends to the sick and the poor. The figure of Be-done-by-as-you-did displays the moral consequences of human actions (Tom’s abusive master Grimes, for example, finds himself stuck in a chimney), while Do-as-you-would-be-done-by ministers mercy and grace. Kingsley portrays Mother Carey as the creator, but one

who sits and thinks and makes creatures “make themselves” (1976, 307). This form of creation, of creatures making themselves over time (Mother Carey is a white haired lady) clearly refers to Darwin’s theory of evolution, but Kingsley firmly grounds this forming of the natural world in a Christian framework – it is in many ways a “moral formation” of creatures, humans included, as these creatures form themselves under the moral/divine gaze of Mother Carey. The fluidity that the Irishwoman/Queen of the fairies displays exemplifies how Kingsley sees the divine role as both separate and greater than the natural world in knowledge, but intrinsically present within it. At this point in the narrative, however, the Irishwoman, while still mysterious, is no longer a stranger; Tom and the reader are familiar with her and her ways. These two bookends to the plot—the stranger at the beginning of the story who at the end remains mysterious but no longer a stranger—serve Kingsley’s purpose in showing God as inherently involved in the natural world and recognizable even while his ways may not be completely known.

Analyzing Kingsley’s portrayal of the Irishwoman (and her supernatural counterparts) as part of the Christian Godhead against the third-culture model reveals some of the intricacies of Kingsley’s doctrine. Kingsley shows that displacement has an inherent place in the universe that he structures; the Godhead is “out of place” in the natural world by its sheer magnitude – in size, knowledge, and power. In *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley does not delineate a concept of heaven or the afterlife that would provide a counterpart or counterpoint to the natural world.⁴ The only context

⁴ Kingsley does hint at the concept of an afterlife when he compares the transformation a dragonfly undergoes to the stages in human life and suggests that death will be yet another transformation, Kingsley questions the reader “Does not each of us, in coming into this world, go through a transformation just as wonderful as that of a sea-egg, or a butterfly? and do not reason and analogy, as well as Scripture, tell us that the transformation is not the last? and that, though what we shall be, we know not, yet we are here but as the crawling caterpillar, and shall be hereafter as the perfect fly” (1976, 87).

that the text offers the reader is the natural world and the different human communities seen at various points in the story; the Godhead's displacement, therefore, is consistent with basic Christian doctrine. The Christian Godhead's mysterious nature throughout the text reveals another aspect of displacement. For instance, the more time Tom and Ellie spend with the fairies the more familiar they become, but the fairies are not completely comprehensible to the children or to the other characters in the story. The Godhead's mysteriousness – even in the midst of familiarity – is also consistent with Christian doctrine. The alterity of the Godhead, in this context, does not prove to be problematic.

Kingsley's choice of race in his use of a poor *Irishwoman* to represent both omnipotence and divine agency, however, proves to be puzzling. Kingsley's reference to the Irish creates ambivalence about doctrine and race. The majority of poor Irish in the mid-nineteenth century were Catholic, and while Kingsley expressed benign admiration for Darwin and Huxley, Kingsley articulated virulent antagonism toward the Catholic Church and Catholic doctrine. Even if Kingsley had envisioned his Irishwoman as Protestant (and there is no indication of this in the text), he could not disassociate this figure (or consequently the Godhead) from Catholicism in the mind of his readers. While this association with Catholicism does not necessarily pose any problem for the reader (unless the reader shared Kingsley's stance against Catholicism), this bizarre use of the Irish, in the context of Kingsley's personal biases, highlights the problem that certain elements of *The Water-Babies* do not fit neatly together. The Irishwoman not only becomes a disruptive character in the narrative as she chases Tom into becoming a water-baby, but also points to the difficulties Kingsley faced in presenting a cohesive understanding of doctrine and science leading to moral formation.

Apart from the doctrinal and denominational associations with the Irish, the term also evokes associations with Victorian race theory and racial hierarchy. If this character were the only instance of reference to race in the story, the association of the Irish with race theory would not necessarily need to be made, but Kingsley makes other references to race in the narrative as well. The grand estate of Harthover, for instance, reflects different architectural periods, and Kingsley also mentions races such as Anglo-Saxons and Goths, yet these connections are casual observations. However, Kingsley makes a clear link between evolution, race, and moral formation in his treatment of a make-believe race, the Doasyoulikes, “who came away from the country of Hardwork, because they wanted to play on the Jews’ harp all day long” (1976, 258). The Doasyoulikes’ moral and physical lassitude has its toll; Kingsley depicts a process of evolution that slowly and surely makes these humans into apes. Kingsley adds an edge to this moral tale when the last of the Doasyoulikes, quite gorilla-like, tries to grunt out the famous abolitionist slogan “Am I not a man and a brother?” (1976, 267) just before being shot.⁵ Later in the text, Kingsley portrays, through Mother Carey, the formation of creatures (and by implication races); at this point in the text, however, Kingsley shows the moral and physical *de-formation* of creatures and races. This equation of Africans to a less evolved race was not atypical of Victorian race theory, but it throws into relief the strange quality of Kingsley’s use of the term “Irish” in *The Water-Babies*. The Irish in Victorian times were, like the Africans, seen as a less evolved race than the Anglo-Saxons, and Kingsley himself made statements to this effect. Anthony S. Wohl, in discussing racism in Victorian England, cites L. P. Curtis, who quotes Kingsley stating in a letter to his wife: “I am

⁵ Amanda Hodgson provides an external context for this scene in *The Water-Babies*. Hodgson references a caricature appearing in *Punch* on May 18, 1861 titled “Monkeyana.” The figure, a gorilla, has a placard placed over its midriff stating “Am I A Man And A Brother” (Hodgson 1999, 233).

haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw [in Ireland] . . . I don't believe they are our fault. . . . But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much. . . ." (Wohl 2012). I do not see that Kingsley's portrayal of the Irishwoman as a form of divine power and knowledge in *The Water-Babies* as an indication that he was trying to recast his position on race relations; rather, it points to the displacement that arises in the text. While some of this displacement that Kingsley structures into his portrayal of the Godhead is consistent with the tenets of Christian doctrine, his reference to race also creates ambivalence and ambiguity in the text.

The discrepancies that Kingsley cannot avoid in the Godhead point to the complexities of the issues that he was addressing in 1863. When More and Wollstonecraft used the term "moral" in the 1700s, the concept, while in no way monolithic in meaning, had a clear referential link to religious practice. Kingsley's idea of moral formation may seem familiar to an audience that had already been exposed to More and Wollstonecraft, but the changing relationship of church and state and the publication of *The Origin of Species* prevented *The Water-Babies* from being a simple polemic. The concept of "moral" in a post-Darwin society no longer seemed to have a secure referential base, and the terms "development" and "formation" became loaded terms in the context of biological evolution. To the catechetical question "How does one remain moral in a scientific and secular world?", Kingsley's answer was *The Water-Babies*. At places cohesive, at points fragmented, *The Water-Babies* illuminates the difficulties this discourse entered into the mid-1800s.

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