



Evolution and Imagination in Victorian Children's Literature (Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture)

Jessica Straley

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Evolutionary theory sparked numerous speculations about human development, and none was so ardently embraced as the idea that children are animals recapitulating the ascent of the species. After Darwin's *Origin of Species*, scientific, pedagogical, and literary works featuring beastly babes and wild children interrogated how our ancestors evolved and what children must do in order to repeat this murky course to humanity. Exploring fictions by Rudyard Kipling, Lewis Carroll, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Charles Kingsley, and Margaret Gatty, Jessica Straley argues that Victorian children's literature not only adopted this new taxonomy of the animal child, but also suggested ways to complete his/her evolution. In the midst of debates about elementary education and the rising dominance of the sciences, children's authors plotted miniaturized evolutions for their protagonists and readers, and, more pointedly, proposed that the decisive evolutionary leap for both our ancestors and ourselves is the advent of the literary imagination.

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