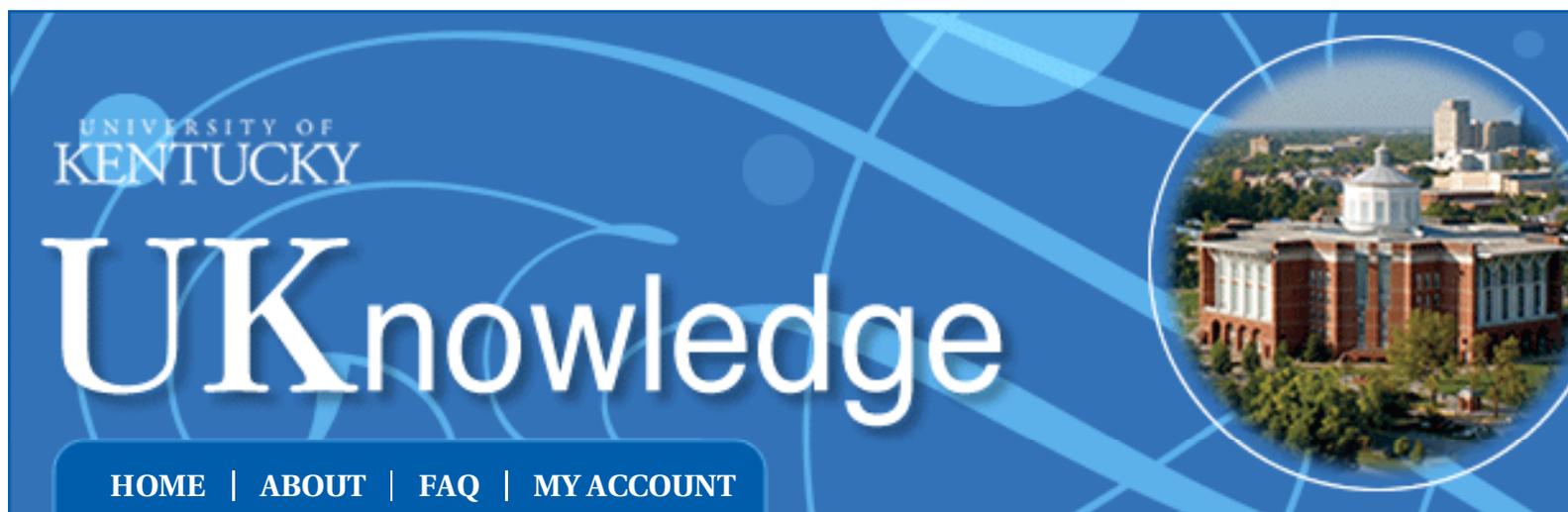


The Joys of Earth: Evolutionary Kinship in Victorian Atheist and Agnostic Authors.

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The Joys of Earth: Evolutionary Kinship in Victorian Atheist and Agnostic Authors

[Keri R. Stevenson, University of Kentucky](#)

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Abstract

Darwin's evolutionary theory provided, for some atheist and agnostic authors in Victorian England, a theory of kinship and community, of invention and discovery.

had been missing before. Without a “creation” story that could version, those who stood outside the dominant Christian paradigm or concepts to construct their own visions of how humans fit species, into landscapes, and into a world that, if unfallen, seek explanations. Those who did construct alternate mythologies on a Christian base.

Into the Victorian loss of faith, Darwin’s theory irrupted, another form of Christian belief but a living tree for those who could accept and trace them to their logical ends. Darwin’s own beliefs and support moved in an agnostic direction; scientific evidence gave a solid, often intended ground for the growth of stories that did not have a teleology or transcendence and separation from the animal world. This tension was not absolute sameness as other species, but a middle ground, a new ground, inescapable bonds, at once without traditional comfort and full of new joy, can be expressed as kinship-in-difference.

These ideas still hold resonance within the modern world, where we know that human beings are descended from other species, and with the knowledge that human beings are bounded within the environment of Earth and subject to catastrophes. Fantasies of escape and theological and teleological narratives flourish in modern nature writing, side-by-side with a concept that flattens down all differences between humans and animals and subsumes them into an amorphous mass. Kinship is a way to rethink the human connection to the environment that offers a mixture of hope, realism, and reevaluation. Kinship has shaped so much of our engagement with the world. Victorian nature writers, such as George Eliot, George Meredith, and Algernon Swinburne, and their convictions, provide one extremely lively and relevant model.

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