

"THE GREAT FAIRY SCIENCE":
THE MARRIAGE OF NATURAL HISTORY AND FANTASY
IN VICTORIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the merging of two unlikely literary partners – natural history writing and fantasy – as a subgenre of mid- to late nineteenth century British children's literature. Tailoring natural history for children, the religiously-motivated writers discussed in this study desired to instill in their readers a respect and appreciation for nature. As the nineteenth century advanced, the natural world for many Victorians slowly lost its moral and divine significance in the face of rapid economic, technological, and scientific change. From the natural theology of Margaret Gatty to the providence-guided evolution of Charles Kingsley to the spirituality of Arabella Buckley, I contend that these writers coupled fantasy with science and natural history to invest nature again with the wonder and mystery that modernity had taken away.