***Alice in Darwin’s Wonderland: Lewis Carroll’s ‘Alice’ Books and the Theory of Evolution***

**By David Lockwood.**

**Synopsis**

**Introduction**

The role played by Nature in Victorian science and culture. The development of classification schemes and the relation between religion and science. The chief principles of Darwinian evolutionary theory, and of the largely discredited ideas of Lamarckian inheritance by acquired characteristics and of Haeckel’s recapitulation theory. Problems associated with the concept of species. The nature of scientific theory, falsifiability and the distinction between logical and scientific/physical possibility. Gillian Beer and George Levine on Darwin’s influence on nineteenth-century literature.

**Chapter One: *Alice* as Natural History**

Drawing on the writings of Rose Lovell-Smith and Laurence Talairach, this chapter discusses how the *Alice* books mimic natural history texts.

**Chapter Two:**  **Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies***

Examines *The Water-Babies*, a novel permeated by references to evolution, and one which significantly influenced Carroll’s tales.

**Chapter Three**: **Carroll’s Attitude Towards Evolutionary Theory**

Concerned with examining Carroll’s attitude towards evolutionary theory, as a prerequisite for trying to grasp his intentions. Survey of both earlier and contemporary accounts of this topic, from William Empson to Laura White.

**Chapters Four: Evolutionary Themes and Motifs in** Alice

Natural selection and predation; the struggle to survive; adaptation; the pool of tears; apes and monkeys; the pigeon and its eggs; the beetle and the gnat. White’s claim that Carroll intended the caucus-race to demonstrate the incoherence of the notion of ‘the survival of the fittest’. The Darwinian interpretation and the selection of illustrations.

**Chapter Five: Mankind’s Place among the Animals**

The classification of species, scientific versus practical categories, anti-essentialism in species and in language. Anxieties aboutmankind’s place among the animals, natural and social hierarchies.

**Chapter Six:** **Speciation, Metamorphoses and Hybrids in *Alice***

Speciation and bodily transformation, metamorphoses and hybrid creatures, with particular reference to the Mock Turtle.

**Chapter Seven: Transitional Species, Extinction and Prehistoric Animals**

Transitional Species. Extinction: The Dodo and the Bread-and-butterfly. The Jabberwock and *Archaeopteryx*.

**Chapter Eight: Plants, Gardens and the Seashore**

Flora in *Alice*. Differences between the *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* gardens. Motifs connected with the seashore.

**Chapter Nine: *Alice*: Language and Morality**

*Alice* and the origin of language. Moral issues raised by an evolutionary perspective on Carroll’s tales.

**Chapter Ten: Devolution, Degeneration and the Other**

Victorian anxieties about devolution and degeneration.Issues connected with race and colonialism.

**Chapter Eleven: Chance, Chaos and Recapitulation in the Darwinian Universe**

A. Dwight Culler and the role of chance in Darwinian theory. Beer on the emergence of order from disorder. Greg Myers on didactic dialogues in *Alice*. Jessica Straley on recapitulation theory and Carroll’s use of parody.

**Conclusion**

**Appendix**

Darwinian allusions in Carroll’s poem *The Hunting of the Snark* and in the *Sylvie and Bruno* Books.