

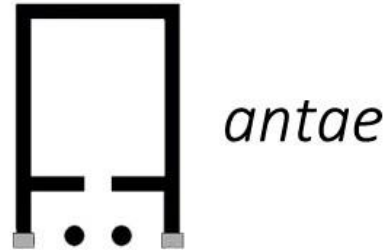
Survival of the Most Memorable: Darwin's Textual Afterlife Through Rhetoric in *On the Origin of Species*

Samuel Head

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**Survival of the Most Memorable: Darwin's Textual Afterlife Through
Rhetoric in *On the Origin of Species***

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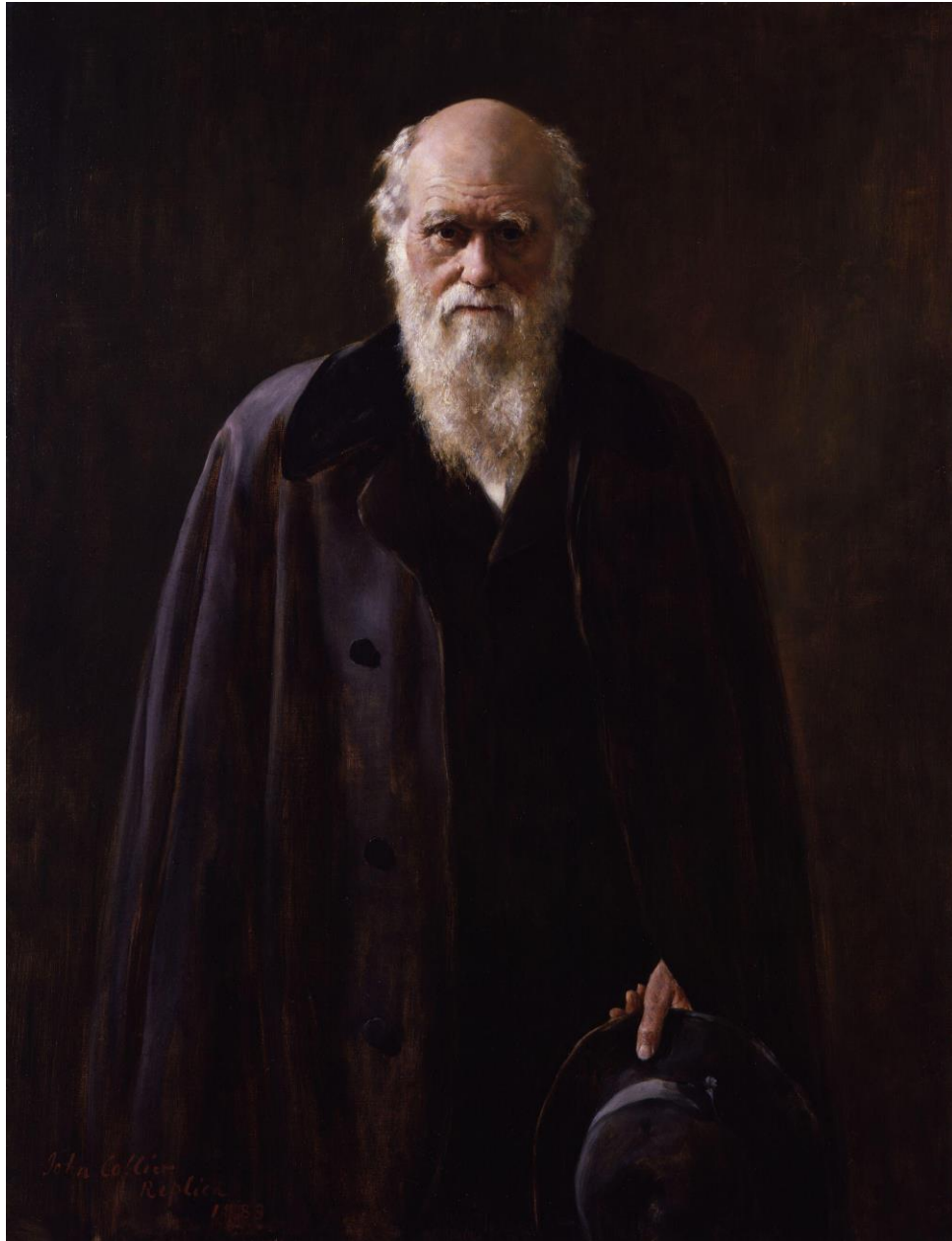


Figure 1: John Collier, *Charles Robert Darwin* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 1883).

Introduction

In most contemporary conversations about the theory of evolution, Charles Darwin's name invariably arises. 'Darwinism' is a term coined to explain the use of evolutionary processes in a variety of contexts. Yet, the unassuming Charles Darwin did not invent the theory of evolution; in fact, the idea of evolution has roots reaching as far back as philosophers from 300 B.C., and continued to have many supporters who added on to the theory.¹ Why then do we remember Darwin as the figurehead for this biological model and not any of these other evolutionists? Why does Charles Darwin live on in the discussion of evolution? Scientists and historians will point out that Darwin developed the mechanism of natural selection that logically explains evolution, and that he also had much empirical data to support his ideas of survival of the fittest, elements that his contemporaries lacked in their treatises on evolution.² These facts support why natural selection and 'survival of the fittest' are taught in schools.

However, I argue that one reason why we remember Charles Darwin the man comes from his rhetorical endeavor to create a textual afterlife for himself. Living on, or creating a personal afterlife for yourself within your written works, is a trait that scholars have observed as a goal within the works of many literary poets and authors of the 19th-century. Lord Byron, William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, and other literary figures of the age would imbue their writing with their own personality and identity, looking forward to being remembered by their future posterity. According to Andrew Bennett in his book *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*,

[T]his culture figures the [writer] living on in the mind or thoughts of readers, literally inhabiting the minds of others, not as a memory of the dead in the survivor, but as the poet's own thoughts, his or her words reinscribed in the readerly mind, rethought.³

Darwin, apparently, also put enough of his person into his writings, especially *On the Origin of Species*, to create his own afterlife, one that would survive the other evolutionists. I will show, through Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories of identification and transcendence, that Darwin survives the other evolutionists in our memory by creating his own textual afterlife. These rhetorical strategies would connect him to and help him exist in the minds of not only his contemporary Victorians, but also generations of people after them who would encounter Darwin and his theory of evolution.

¹ Rebecca Stott, *Darwin's Ghosts: the Secret History of Evolution* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2012), p. 15.

² D. R. Oldroyd, *Darwinian impacts: an introduction to the Darwinian revolution* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980), p. x.

³ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 18.

‘Like Confessing a Murder’: The Historical Setting and Trajectory of Darwin’s Reception

Before the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, evolution, or ‘transmutation’ as it was then called, had been part of general scientific discussion among the Victorians, though it was not a central topic.⁴ However, among the scientists of the day the subject of transmutation and the means by which it occurred was described as ‘the mystery of mysteries’.⁵ In 1844 Robert Chambers anonymously published the book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* in which he discussed the issue of transmutation at length. The book, though popular among many circles, still ‘caused a huge row’ according to David Reznick, a biologist writing about *On the Origin of the Species*.⁶ The book was widely read and it created quite a scandal about the issue of evolution. Before Chambers, there was much embarrassment in discussing evolution openly and in the public sphere. Even Darwin himself, before he published *Origin*, jokingly said that it was ‘like confessing a murder’ to admit to believe in evolution.⁷ However, *Vestiges* did help to break the ice about discussing evolution. Though Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges* was more widely read than Darwin’s *Origin of Species* at that time and was considered groundbreaking in placing evolution directly within the public’s scrutiny, Darwin still sticks out as the evolutionist we remember.⁸

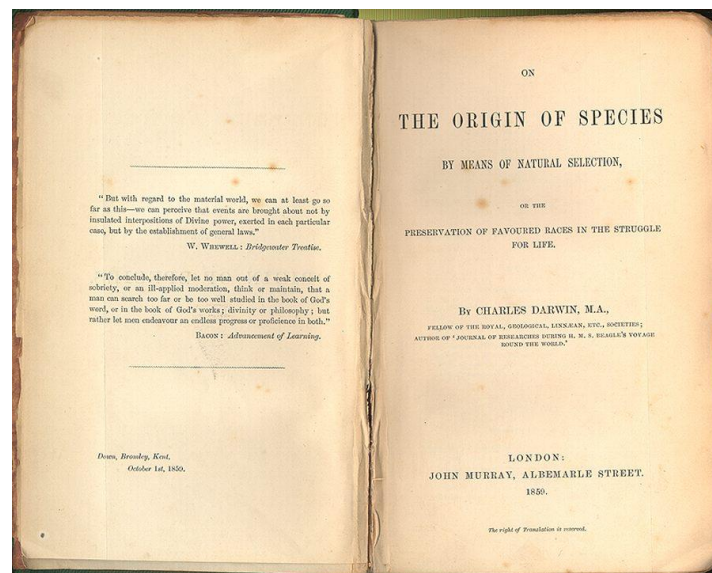


Figure 2: Charles Darwin – the 1859 cover of *On the Origin of Species* (Wikimedia Commons, n.d.).

⁴ James A. Secord, ‘Global Darwin’ in *Darwin*, ed. by William Brown and Andrew C. Fabian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 41.

⁵ Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian revolution: science red in tooth and claw* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 160.

⁶ David N. Reznick, *The Origin then and now an interpretive guide to the Origin of species* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 19.

⁷ Secord, ‘Global Darwin’, p. 42.

⁸ Alvar Ellegård, *Darwin and the general reader; the reception of Darwin's theory of evolution in the British periodical press, 1859-1872* (Göteborg: Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, 1958), p. 333.

Incongruously however, though evolution soon became accepted and believed within the scientific community after Darwin's publication of the *Origin*, Darwin's mechanism of natural selection was considered by many to be incorrect.⁹ It was not until the 1930s that modern research on evolution placed natural selection as the mechanism by which it worked.¹⁰ Yet, throughout the span from the 1860s until the 1930s, Darwin was still the banner for evolution, and the name besmirched or lauded by those who faced the theory. According to Amanda Rees, 'He has become iconic, his name standing as shorthand for the whole notion of evolution and as such, becoming the object of veneration and respect'.¹¹ This survival can be attributed to his textual afterlife that exists from within his *Origin of Species*.

It is important to re-emphasise that although Charles Darwin did not invent the theory of evolution he is the scientist tied to it. Evolution had been a concept that many scholars had debated before Darwin came around, but Darwin only added the mechanism of natural selection to the mix. Yet, even though he was not the creator of the idea of evolution, Darwin's name is the one that lives on in our memory as the one being inextricably linked to evolution. This essay will look at the ways in which Darwin was involved in preserving his identity through his writing and how he set himself up to be remembered within evolution. Perhaps Darwin did not realise how much his name would stand for evolution for generations, but the elements of a textual afterlife, with the rhetorical methods of identification and transcendence, do exist as a testament of his lasting textual permanence.

Darwin's Attempts to be Remembered: The Textual Afterlife

The Victorians, as well as those Britons who lived within the Romantic era, often contemplated how they would be remembered in the future. In fact, there was much literature focused around how the future would regard those beings that lived in the Victorian Age. Kelly Mays has stated that these Victorians were aware of the fact that the "history" regarding themselves would be dependent on how future posterity would view them. Quoting John Stuart Mill's 1831 essay 'The Spirit of an Age', she captures the Victorian reimagining of the present from the eyes of the future: 'the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance'.¹² Here Mills is imbuing the present society with the urge to make sure their era is 'preserved' in memory. Mays goes on to describe that the Victorians' writings often looked forward by looking backward to describe the 'Victorian Age', and attempted to 'catalog its characteristics and constitute its canons'.¹³ Indeed, Darwin was part of this culture and perhaps sought in part to preserve himself by being

⁹ Ellegård, p. 17.

¹⁰ Secord, 'Global Darwin', p. 43.

¹¹ Amanda Rees, 'The Undead Darwin: Iconic Narrative, Scientific Controversy And The History Of Science', *History Of Science*, 47:4 (2009), 445-457 (p. 447).

¹² Kelly J. Mays, 'Looking Backward, Looking Forward: The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror of Future History', *Victorian Studies*, 53:3 (2011), 445-456 (p. 446).

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 453.

remembered by posterity and thus be canonised. His work suggests that he was invested in this kind of remembrance.



[Ruins of the Cathedral of Kildare.]

Figure 3: Anonymous. A woodcut of the ruins of Kildare Cathedral (The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 1835). Just as Victorians looked at the ruins they encountered, they imagined how future societies would encounter the ruins of their own period.

Within *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin exemplified the aspect of looking forward by looking backward to contextualize himself within the discovery of natural selection. Darwin described a future that analysed the discoveries contained within *On the Origin of Species*. Kelly Mays explains that such futuristic historical contextualization was common among the Victorians. They often tried to see themselves as a futuristic ‘New Zealander’ would if confronted with the ruins of London. She says that ‘[A] common gesture [...] is the invocation of an anonymous figure from the future variously identified as a “future historian”, “critic”, “philologist”, “philosopher”, “genealogist”, “archaeologist”, (historical) “painter” or “novelist”, or simply a “student of” or “writer” on “the Victorian age”’.¹⁴ Darwin himself invoked a similar futuristic “naturalist” to view his ideas. When speaking on those who might doubt his theory, he says: ‘I look with confidence to the future, to young and rising naturalists, who will be able to view both

¹⁴ Mays, ‘Looking Backward, Looking Forward: The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror of Future History’, p. 447-448.

sides of the question with impartiality'.¹⁵ To Darwin these naturalists would show that he does stand correct in his theory. Darwin also brings up this futuristic view when he declares that 'When the views entertained in this volume on *On the Origin of Species*, or when analogous views are generally admitted, we can dimly foresee that there will be a considerable revolution in natural history'.¹⁶ He goes on to state:

The other and more general departments of natural history will rise greatly in interest.... When we thus view each organic being [as having a history], how far more interesting, I speak from experience, will the study of natural history become!¹⁷

This passion and invocation of what the future will bring enabled Darwin to speak prophetically and galvanise readers to also contemplate as to how natural selection will fit into the future.

Darwin not only suggested that readers contemplate how the future would establish and confirm his work, but also uplifted himself as being the first to contemplate this wondrous view. Avows Darwin: 'A grand and almost untrodden field of inquiry will be opened'.¹⁸ James Costa affirms this feeling when he muses, 'How exciting it must have been for Darwin to realise that he alone among scientists understood this'.¹⁹ Costa also points out a passage from Darwin's notebooks that follows Darwin's excited fervor over his discovery:

Once grant that [species] may pass into each other.--grant that one instinct to be acquired (in the medullary point in ovum. has such organization as to force in one man the development of a brain capable of producing more glowing imagining or more profound reasoning than other--if this be granted!!) & whole fabric totters and falls.--look abroad, study gradation. study unity of type--study geographical distribution study relation of fossil with recent. the fabric falls!²⁰

Here, and within *On the Origin of Species*, we see Darwin witnessing the scope of his new theory. This view would provide Darwin with the ability to immortalise his place within the history of science. Consequently, we see how Darwin portrays his part in the discovery of this theory. Though modestly not naming himself within these passages, he does give himself the credit as being their author.

However, before publishing *On the Origin of Species*, we also see that Darwin was concerned about losing his place as being remembered for his contributions to the theory of evolution. Though Darwin had thought up his theories of evolution and natural selection many years before the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, he postponed publishing his findings for over fifteen years.²¹ Scholars have debated over the reason for this long wait, whether it was from lack of scientific standing on Darwin's part, or a reluctance to receive a negative reception as had happened to Chamber with his *Vestiges*; however, these reasons are irrelevant to this discussion. What is insightful to note though is that during this time Darwin struggled with extremely poor

¹⁵ Charles Darwin, *On The Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 482.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 484.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 485-486.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 486.

¹⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Annotated Origin*, ed. by James T. Costa (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 486.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution: science red in tooth and claw*, p. 184.

health, and though Darwin did delay his publication, he did charge that his original *Essay*, which contained his theories, be published in the event of his death. As Michael Ruse says ‘Darwin had no desire to be ignored by posterity’.²² Natural selection had the likelihood of also being discovered by other scientists in the near future (as Alfred Wallace did in 1858), so why was Darwin concerned with the publication of his *Essay*? We can surmise that his motives could have been to preserve his name as the one who had first found out the mechanism by which evolution could occur. Up to this point, his career and life’s work had revolved around discovering this mechanism; the *Origin* is only a brief glimpse of a large amount of data that he had amassed in his studies. With such a charged and revolutionary topic, to have so much work be dismissed or forgotten would be devastating.

In relation to Alfred Russell Wallace, the arrival of his paper in 1858 also reveals Darwin’s motives of wanting to be remembered by posterity. Darwin had been originally planning to publish a much more lengthy work on natural selection that he was still years away from publishing. When Wallace’s paper came to Darwin in 1858 from India, Darwin realised that here was Wallace who had also independently hit upon the idea of natural selection. Afraid of losing his place as the primary scientist who had discovered natural selection, Darwin was convinced by his friends Lyell and Hooker to present the idea in a joint paper to the Linnaean Society in London.²³ The paper received little attention at that time, but the following year, Darwin excised portions of his larger project to create and publish *On the Origin of Species*. Again, we see that Charles Darwin was invested in the idea of preserving his place for posterity as being the first scientist to discover the mechanism of natural selection. Though it is impossible to know a person’s intentions (one cannot judge a work based on mere assumptions of intent), his or her motives can be surmised by an analysis of the rhetorical setting. Therefore, we can uncover evidence to show that Darwin wanted to be remembered by posterity so as to not lose his place in history to Wallace.

As was stated at the beginning of this essay, a culture of posterity had been in the minds of the Romantics, the poets and novelists immediately preceding Charles Darwin’s own lifetime. The theory of the author inscribing his identity within his writing as a means of living on in the memory of posterity through their reading his works may have been within Darwin’s schema as he wrote *On the Origin of Species*. Speaking on the Romantics’ culture of posterity, Andrew Bennett argues:

In this sense, individual identity is transferred or metamorphosed into language, becomes language, which is then dispersed or disseminated in the minds of others.... Wordsworth writes his life into poetry, composes himself, in *The Prelude*, as a prelude to writing his great but never written epic *The Recluse*; Shelley figures the effect of poetry as a kind of haunting power and proceeds to ghost-write his own life, to ghost himself, in poems like *Alastor*, *Adonais* and *The Triumph of Life*; Byron makes of his life an image or series of images for public consumption [...]. [L]iterature becomes a paradoxical strategy of self-preservation and, at the same time, self-dissolution - the very being of the poet inscribed in text, inscribed *as* text, in a life beyond life.²⁴

²² Ruse, p. 185.

²³ Oldroyd, *Darwinian impacts: an introduction to the Darwinian revolution*, p. 84.

²⁴ Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, pp. 18-19.

Darwin not only inscribed the mention of himself by bringing up how future historians would view his theory and himself, but he also took pains to include himself and his personality within *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin, as it appears, was much invested in making sure that he would be remembered above other evolutionists through his work.

Linguistically, Darwin did set himself apart from his contemporary evolutionists by his use of the first person singular. It was not uncommon to use 'I,' 'me,' or 'my,' but Darwin virtually littered his book with references to himself. There are close to 1200 uses of the first person singular within *On the Origin of Species* out of a word count of over 150,000. Consider, for example, Darwin's use of the first-person singular in: 'And this leads *me* to say a few words on what *I* call Sexual Selection', or '*I* have now recapitulated the chief facts and considerations which have thoroughly convinced *me* that species have changed'; or even: 'The principle, which *I* have designated by this term, is of high importance on *my* theory, and explains, as *I* believe, several important facts'.²⁵ But more than just the use of the first-person singular, throughout Darwin's book he frequently repeats the phrase "my theory" (around sixty times), laying specific claim and authorship to the mechanism that he describes.

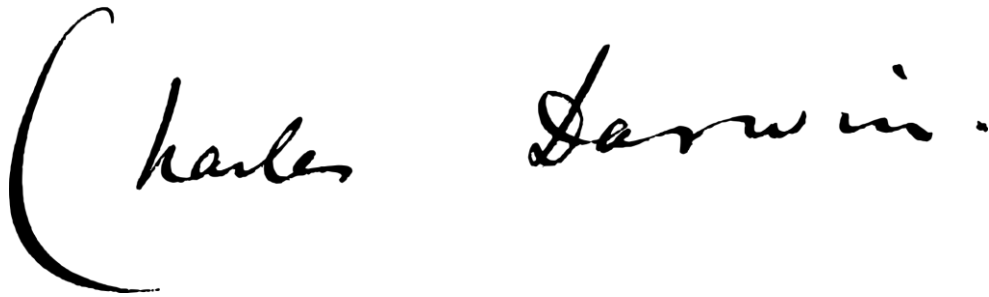


Figure 4: Charles Darwin's signature (Heritage Auction Gallery, Texas, 1865). Darwin's signature is an emblem of his own persona, a part of the naturalist who was to be remembered.

Contrast that use of the first-person singular to Charles Lyell's publication *Principles of Geology* with only 556 instances of the form (out of over 427,000 words, almost three times the size of *The Origin*) and little to no implications of authorial ownership.²⁶ Such extensive use of the referent to himself suggests the inscription of the author upon the mind of the reader that Bennett mentions in his textual afterlife theory. Darwin not only made sure his theory is remembered, but that he is remembered with it. Linguistically, with the individual 'I' we see Darwin setting himself up to be not so easily forgotten after the reader puts down *The Origin*.

Other scholars have also noticed how Darwin himself appears in his 'abstract.' Benjamin Bradley explains that people found Darwin similar to the Romantic poets who were thought to be 'egotistical,' discussing the evolutionary theory as if it came from him only.²⁷ Janet Browne, a biographer of Darwin's *Origin*, expounded on Darwin's personal appearance within the book:

²⁵ Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, pp. 88, 480, 111. My emphasis.

²⁶ Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 3rd edition (London: Murray, 1835).

²⁷ Benjamin Sylvester Bradley, 'Darwin's Sublime: The Contest Between Reason And Imagination In "On The Origin of Species"', *Journal Of The History Of Biology*, 44:2 (2011), 205-232 (p. 225).

He appeared in his book just as he appeared in life: as a reputable scientific gentleman, courteous, trustworthy and friendly, a man who did not speak lightly of the momentous questions coming under his gaze, a champion of common sense, honest to his data, and scornful of ‘mere conjecture’. This humane style of writing was one of his greatest gifts, immensely appealing to British readers who saw in it all the best qualities of their ancient literary tradition and contemporary Victorian values.²⁸

As has been mentioned, beyond just invoking the “I” within *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin linked his own character and personality with that “I.” Here Browne is merging the personal Charles Darwin with the traditions and values of the Victorians, an example of the individual existing through his work and how his work identifies with its audience through common ground.

As we look through Darwin’s book we see the naturalist himself peering back out at us. We become acquainted with the man through Darwin’s various personal narratives. The “I” within *The Origin* presents his case in a rather humble but thorough way. And yet, we also see the passion of the naturalist for such a radical topic also peeking through this personality. Moreover, as shall be discussed later, we see his poetic side as he uses transcendental language to describe what might otherwise be a dry scientific topic. These qualities and personality traits, as well as the ones mentioned by Browne, also live on with the concept of Darwin, the Evolutionist, as he might want to be remembered by posterity.

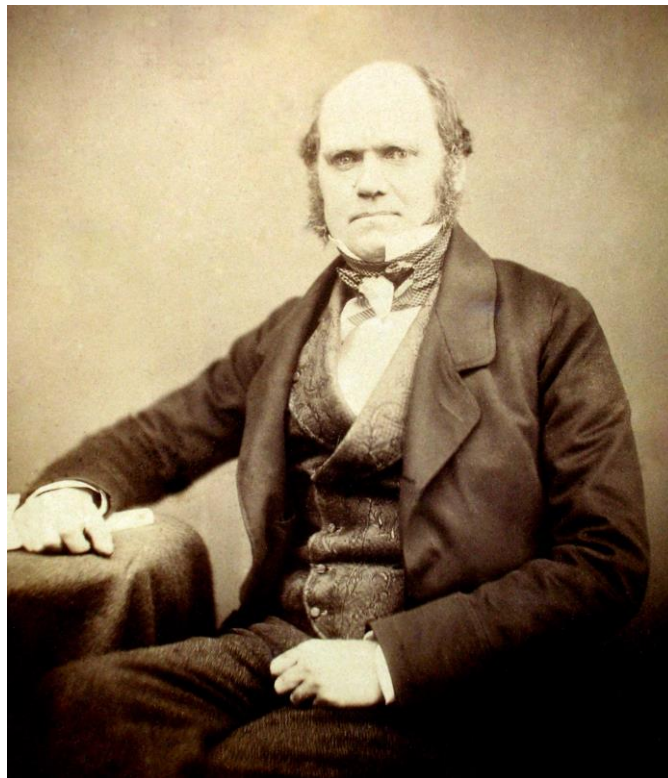


Figure 5: Maull and Polyblank, *Photograph of Charles Darwin* (Old Library of Christ's College, Cambridge, 1855).

²⁸ Janet Browne, *Darwin's Origin of Species: A biography - A book that shook the world* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), p. 68.

In summary to this point, Darwin followed contemporary theories of contemplating how the future would receive and view both his work and himself. We see that he invoked the future and the future naturalist to confirm himself and his theory; he took lengths to make sure that his work would become public in the case of his death; and we see that he strived to establish his work as the primary text of natural selection before Wallace could. Darwin also followed the Romantics' culture of posterity by imbuing himself within the actual text of *On the Origin of Species* by his linguistic use of the first person singular, and by employing his appealing personality within the writing. However, such methods become meaningless if no one connects to the work enough to remember and read it. After all, where is one's textual afterlife if no one reads or remembers you? This next section will discuss how Darwin and his *Origin of Species* utilizes the rhetorical strategy of identification, as described by Kenneth Burke, to help solidify Darwin's attempt at creating a textual afterlife through his written work.

Finding Common Ground: Darwin's Use of Burke's Identification

As the Romantics saw it, a textual afterlife was possible if one imbued one's literature and writings with one's own personality and identity. That way, every time the work was read, that personality and identity would be invoked within the mind of the reader, creating an afterlife of that Romantic within the memory of the reader. For Darwin, he had inscribed himself in *On the Origin of Species*, but he probably knew that for such a field as science, it takes being actually read by posterity first before one can be remembered. In order to be read and remembered by posterity, especially within science, it is often expedient to be known as the first in something. Surviving within the pages of history requires this memorability. For a topic as complex and controversial as evolution, that required being able to scientifically prove, or demonstrate, without reasonable doubt, that your mechanism for evolution was not only viable, but believable. This kind of persuasion is deeply rhetorical; ergo, Darwin's struggle for survival to be remembered would require a skillful use of rhetoric to persuade one's audience.

Here the methods by which Charles Darwin placed himself within *On the Origin of Species* and ensured his endurance as *the* Evolutionist will be connected to the rhetorical theories that Kenneth Burke has postulated. Burke, one of the most influential rhetoricians of the 20th century, argued that any persuasive communication comes down to how a rhetor identifies with his or her audience. Kenneth Burke traced this fundamental persuasive aspect to Aristotle when he stated:

Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his [...]. And you give the 'signs' of such consubstantiality by deference to an audience's 'opinions.' For the orator, following Aristotle and Cicero, will seek to display the appropriate 'signs' of character needed to earn the audience's good will.²⁹

This rhetorical practice, though only thoroughly described by Burke within the last century, remains a common phenomenon in communication throughout history.

²⁹ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1953), pp. 55-56.

Burke explained that identification comes as a result of humans being physically divided from each other. We seek to overcome that division by finding what we have in common with the people we are in contact with, and how we can identify with them. This bridge building involves finding the ‘substance’ that both parties have (or what they might assume they have) in common with each other. Burke defined this state as being consubstantial, and argued that the more consubstantial a rhetor may be with their audience, the more persuasive they are to that audience by virtue of identifying with them so closely.³⁰ The argument here is that Darwin was similarly persuasive and therefore memorable because he employed a great deal of identification, channeling it through the three main strategies of identification: that of creating an assumed or transcendent ‘we,’; using identification through antithesis; and finding common ground with his audience.

Darwin used the linguistic choice of ‘we,’ the first person plural, as a strategy of identification in order for his audience to feel a greater connection to him and his *Origin of Species*. George Cheney, who identified the three main strategies of Burke’s identification, explained that one of them is ‘the assumed or transcendent “we.”’ This technique covers the use of the word ‘we’ to connect together previously unconnected parties. ‘We’ and its other forms, along with ‘they’ identify the individual with their audience in some common group with the same goals, values, and such.³¹ Within *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin uses ‘we,’ ‘us,’ and ‘our,’ all parts of the first person plural, 1481 times. Such a widespread use of the first person plural naturally forges a connection between Darwin and his readers. Though the public might not (and many of them did not) accept Darwin’s theories, the use of the ‘we’ would still connect them to the debate the book proposes. Perhaps in this regard, Darwin was not ‘persuasive’ with the public, but by including them all within his ‘we,’ he certainly established them as members of a community discussing *On the Origin of Species*, and thus established himself as the author of such a community.

It is important to note, however, that contemporaries of Darwin, such as Robert Chambers or Charles Lyell, also used a great deal of the first person plural. Darwin was not exceptional in this regard. Though the scientific community does not accept it now, it was not uncommon for scientists of Darwin’s day to use the first person plural. Still, because Darwin’s book did establish a documented treatise of the issue, and because his name was on the cover, Darwin pushed further into the public eye than other evolutionists had been able to before. Yes, Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges* was more widely read, but Chambers published the book anonymously, whereas Darwin set himself up as poster boy by inscribing his name on the book. Moreover, this establishment of himself as the *first* person to validate evolution by placing it beyond speculation and within the discourse community of demonstrable science would help him to be remembered by posterity, thus invoking his textual afterlife.

Also embedded within Darwin’s *Origin of Species* is the identification through antithesis, or a common enemy, which in his case was ‘ignorance.’ When two parties have a common enemy, or antithesis, they can unite by scapegoating that individual or thing. Burke says that, ‘Antithesis helps reinforce unification by scapegoat’.³² This might be taken as a given, but among scientists,

³⁰ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, pp. 20-22, 55

³¹ George Cheney, ‘The Rhetoric Of Identification And The Study Of Organizational Communication’, *Quarterly Journal Of Speech*, 69:2 (1983), 143-158 (p. 148).

³² Kenneth Burke, *Language as symbolic action: essays on life, literature, and method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 19.

both Victorian and contemporary ones, ignorance is considered an undesirable vice. Darwin knew this and skillfully wove a common thread of identification against ignorance through *On the Origin of Species* in order to unite and identify with his readers against it. The following passage is one such example which illustrates this method:

I by no means expect to convince experienced naturalists whose minds are stocked with a multitude of facts all viewed, during a long course of years, from a point of view directly opposite to mine. It is so easy to hide our ignorance under expressions as the 'plan of creation,' 'unity of design,' &c., and to think that we give an explanation when we only restate a fact.³³

Darwin is integrating ignorance as the reason why any naturalist would oppose his theory. Costa also reflects on Darwin's rhetorical strategies within this section, 'Could Darwin be using the embarrassment ploy, inducing a hostile reader to give his theory a second look to avoid giving the appearance of *inflexibility* of mind, or of hiding his ignorance?'³⁴ Darwin consistently used these methods of 'fighting ignorance' to connect with his audience, another trait of his personality that he inserts deftly into his book. Readers, seeing the attacks against those who are ignorant, would instinctively want to side with Darwin and his theory in order to avoid being scapegoated. This unification helped and helps Darwin to identify with his audience, thereby making the argument, and Darwin, more persuasive, and ultimately more memorable.

Darwin continued his practice of identification through his vast network of correspondence. James Secord states that there have been 'over 15000 letters to and from him and more are being discovered all the time'.³⁵ Other critics have noted and discussed Darwin's expansive use of the post. Because of the development of such efficient communication with a widespread audience, Darwin was able to connect to more people through postal correspondence and create a transcendent 'we' in the process. Janet Browne explains that:

Darwin systematically used the nineteenth-century postal system to facilitate his work [...]. It shows him as an efficient networker and gatherer of facts. We see how he contributed to the controversies over his writings [...] [by] actively participating by letter from his study in Down House.³⁶

³³ Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, p. 481-482.

³⁴ Darwin, *The Annotated Origin*, p. 481.

³⁵ Secord, 'Global Darwin', p. 32.

³⁶ Janet Browne, 'Darwin's Intellectual Development,' in *Darwin*, ed. By William Brown and Andrew C. Fabian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 28.



Figure 6: Welcome Library, *Photograph of the Interior of Charles Darwin's Study* (London, 1932). From this study Darwin sent out much of that correspondence.

Because of his connection through correspondence, Darwin created a larger group immediately and specifically engaged in the debate over his theory. The correspondence fostered a community all involved in the discussion over evolution. This developed the identification through the transcendent and assumed “we” brought about by Darwin’s letter writing, which in the end made him more authoritative and persuasive. It also helped Darwin when it came to not being forgotten as a key member of the debate over evolution.

Lastly, Darwin created a strong sense of identification by his use of “finding common ground” with his audience through using a logical and well-known scientific form and by citing and using many noted scientists of the day. George Cheney explained that this strategy of finding common ground helps to link ‘or equate [the rhetor] with others in an overt manner’.³⁷ Stephen Littlejohn argued that Burke’s identification could be pulled from idealistic sources, or values and standards that the rhetor and his or her audience might have in common.³⁸ During Darwin’s time, a noted form for writing new scientific discovery came from Sir John Herschel who published the work *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural History*. Darwin actually met Herschel

³⁷ Cheney, ‘The Rhetoric Of Identification And The Study Of Organizational Communication’, p. 148.

³⁸ Stephen Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*, 4th edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), p. 180.

while on his voyage of the *Beagle* in South Africa.³⁹ Such a form would be familiar to readers in the Victorian era, and Victorians would understand the logical structure behind Darwin's 'one long argument', thus making him acceptable (scientifically) and thus more memorable to them.

Darwin's textual afterlife, for which purpose he used identification, was further established in the minds and memories of his readers by his use of another example of "finding common ground." Darwin supports his argument by sourcing other noted geologists, naturalists, botanists, paleontologists, and other experts. Just as good evidence and sources are valued and required for any kind of scientific writing in our day, so too was it important among the Victorians. Darwin used over 140 different experts within *On the Origin of Species*, setting up a considerable amount of evidence to support and discuss his theory. Note here, for instance, the language Darwin uses when discussing the differentiation among species: 'I have endeavoured to test this numerically by averages, and, as far as my imperfect results go, they always confirm the view. I have also consulted some sagacious and most experienced observers, and, after deliberation, they concur in this view'.⁴⁰ Darwin links his theories directly with the support that other experts give through their various sources. This method of supporting his arguments with evidence and other authorities on these topics personifies the standard of reliable and reinforced data, an attribute that was valued by other scientists of Darwin's day. Thus, by portraying this standard, Darwin identifies with the values and standards of his audience expected by respected science, thereby making him more persuasive and again, more memorable. His personality also shows through here, demonstrating his position as a man who establishes his own words through the testimony of other experts. An interesting fact with all the cited experts is that Darwin still stands as the author of the theory, not as someone only basing his theory off others, but as the primary scientist of the book. This can be seen by just comparing the amount of sources to the amount of Darwin's use of the first person singular: 140 different experts mentioned as compared to Darwin's 1200 instances of self-mentioning. By this identification through the finding of common ground, Darwin persuasively backs up his idea, and then emphasizes himself at the head of it through his insertion of the 'I' and his personality.

Through this use of identification, Darwin was able to craft not only a scientifically sound, but rhetorically savvy argument. Darwin's rhetoric would help *On the Origin of Species* to identify with its readers, making the treatise more believable. By establishing himself as the first to produce such a credible explanation for evolution, Darwin ensured that he would be read and thus remembered by posterity, invoking his personality and identity, and thus perpetuating his afterlife, with every mention of *On the Origin of Species* and evolution itself.

Burke's Bridge Building: Darwin Transcending Audiences through Sublime Language

In connection to identification, Darwin utilized another technique to ensure his survival as the most memorable. Another aspect of Burke's rhetorical theories involved the bridge building of the theory of "transcendence," or fostering connection through finding a larger generalization that spans the division between two parties. Burke explained transcendence in these terms: 'Viewed as a sheerly terministic or symbolic function, that's what transcendence is: the building

³⁹ Darwin, *The Annotated Origin*, p. xvii.

⁴⁰ Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, p. 57.

of a terministic bridge whereby one realm is transcended by being viewed in terms of a realm “beyond” it”.⁴¹ James Zappen describes the usefulness of transcendence as a way to develop overarching connections between disparate entities:

In a world filled with a cacophony of conflicting voices, such as Burke’s—or our own—transcendence offers not mere persuasion (“You should believe me . . .”) or even identification in its simple and limited sense (“because you and I are really very much alike”) but a promise of larger unities—transcendences—that encompass individual and group differences (“You might agree with each other if you could see that each of your views is partial and incomplete without the others—and perhaps even at odds with itself”).⁴²

Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* tapped into the innate uses described by Burke’s theories of identification and transcendence, and effectively built a bridge to his audiences of the Victorian era as well as those who would read his book in subsequent ages.

The act of identification finds the common ground between two parties and, in a sense, Burke’s transcendence also attains this kind of unification. Darwin’s language transforms and lifts scientific jargon into a sphere obtainable to more than just the Victorian scientist. Burke says that ‘In dialectical transcendence, the principle of transformation operates in terms of a “beyond”. It [...] “builds a bridge” between disparate realms. And insofar as things here and now are treated in terms of a “beyond”, they thereby become infused or inspirited by the addition of a new or further dimension’.⁴³

Unconventionally, Charles Darwin introduces this ‘new or further dimension’ by suffusing passages with sublime text, almost prose poetry. Rebecca Stott mentions that ‘poets have recognised the poet in Darwin. They have recognised in particular the way he moves through the commonplace, the ordinary, the overlooked, to the sublime’.⁴⁴ In order to illustrate this poetic use of the sublime, many critics have pointed out Darwin’s closing passage to *On the Origin of Species*:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. [He gives the laws here.] Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling

⁴¹ Kenneth Burke, ‘I, Eye, Ay—Emerson’s Early Essay on Nature’, *The Sewanee Review* 74:4 (1966), 875-895 (p.877).

⁴² James P. Zappen, ‘Kenneth Burke on Dialectical-Rhetorical Transcendence’, *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 42:3 (2009), 279-301 (p. 281).

⁴³ Burke, ‘I, Eye, Ay’, p. 880.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Stott, ‘Darwin in the Literary World’ in *Darwin*, ed. by William Brown and Andrew C. Fabian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 75.

on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.⁴⁵

This passage is one of many of examples of Darwin's poetical explanation of his theory. Notice the elevate language found within this passage, an almost prose poetry in which Darwin expands upon the 'grandeur' of evolution.



Figure 7: James McDougal Hart, *A Stream in the Adirondacks* (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 1859).

In another passage Darwin speaks about destruction and the beautiful: 'We behold [...] [but] we do not see or we forget [...] we forget [...] we do not always bear in mind [...] it is not so at all seasons'.⁴⁶ Of this passage Stott said: 'The language is elegiac. It is mournful, clouded with sadness; it expresses a dark knowing'.⁴⁷ These passages, by tapping into the sublime, transcend the boundaries between groups of people. Darwin goes on to say, 'Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the universal struggle for life, or more difficult—at least I have found it so—than constantly to bear this conclusion in mind'.⁴⁸ Audiences might not have believed in Darwin's theory, but the transcendental experience of reading Darwin's words made him hard to forget.

⁴⁵ Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, pp. 489-490.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴⁷ Stott Stott, 'Darwin in the Literary World', p. 71.

⁴⁸ Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, p. 116.

These passages within *On the Origin of Species* set up a language that expresses evolution and natural selection as poetical constructs, a language that is more accessible than the idioms of the scientific world. Darwin used metaphors like nature being compared to packed wedges on a yielding surface, ancestry to the tree of life, and the earth's crust as a vast museum. Images such as the battle of the ants, the entangled bank, and so on gave an otherwise tedious idea flavor and life. Near the end of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin demonstrates how to him, his view of the natural world transcends its bounds: 'When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposited, they seem to be to become ennobled'.⁴⁹ The use of such language is transcendental, as Burke explains:

For the same principle is involved (there are tiny 'transcendences') every time an author, no matter how empirical his claims, mounts to a 'higher' level of generalization and in effect asks that 'lower' levels of generalization be interpreted in its terms.⁵⁰

Darwin is asking his audience to view the theory in the much more acceptable and memorable light of literature. This act of transcendence, distinct within *On the Origin of Species*, makes Darwin memorable by building the bridge to his audience. The transcendental nature of such language not only catches our attention, but it also inspires the imagination. Infusing the science with the language and imagination of literature brings more of the humanity into a piece of writing. This humanity relates to both invoke Darwin's personality as well as inscribe him into the memory of his readers. His afterlife exists then, catching the reader's mind in not only a persuasive way, but in a way that shares his passion and his view.

Conclusion: Darwin's Survival as the Fittest in Our Memory

Of course, there are other means that enabled Darwin to stand out. Nevertheless, rhetorically, Darwin used principles that Kenneth Burke has described as identification and transcendence to conjure himself up in our minds every time we read *On the Origin of Species* or whenever the discussion of evolution arises. Though Darwin died in 1882, he lives on through a textual afterlife created within *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin entered the culture of posterity by merging identification and transcendence with his insertion of his personality and his invocation of the future and future naturalists. His use of both the first-person plural and singular identifies his personality to audiences who encounter his text. We see a bit of the 'young naturalist' in Darwin that he brings up to explain speciation: he being the well-known and trusted Victorian naturalist, supported by scientific logic, backed up by other experts, and the one buried in Westminster Abbey. The transcendent nature of select passages in his work lifts our vision of an ordinary scientific theory to one that is sublime and poetical, and spans disciplines in doing so.

⁴⁹ Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, pp. 488-489.

⁵⁰ Burke, 'I, Eye, Ay', p. 882.

This is what makes Darwin survive. Charles Darwin himself provided a reflection on his insertion of himself into his text. When writing to his colleague, Hooker, he made a chagrined confession:

Here is a good joke: H. C. Watson [...] says that in the first four paragraphs of the [Origin's] introduction, the words 'I,' 'me,' 'my,' occur forty-three times! I was dimly conscious of the accursed fact. He says it can be explained phrenologically, which I suppose civilly means, that I am the most egotistically self-sufficient man alive; perhaps so.⁵¹

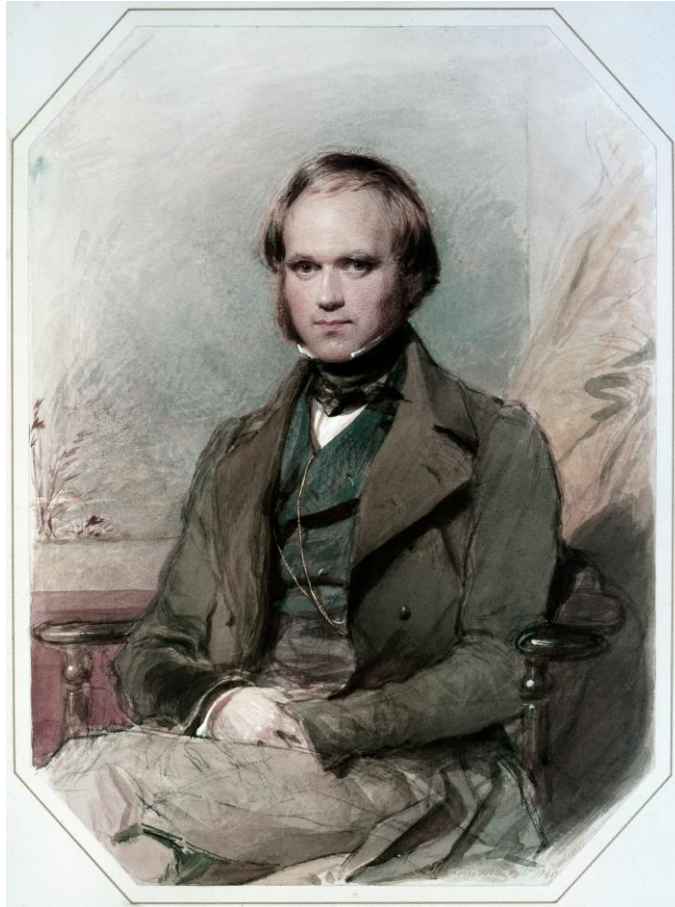


Figure 8: George Richmond, *Portrait of Charles Darwin* (Wikimedia Commons, late 1830s).

Darwin's use of what Burke termed identification and transcendence, as connected to Bennett's culture of posterity, illuminate the rhetorical conventions available to explain why certain people remain firmly ingrained in our minds. Perhaps it is through these rhetorical conventions that makes one "the fittest" to survive whereas another is lost in anonymity. Whatever it may be, Darwin's own theories explain that such survival always has a history and story, and when we analyse that story we can reveal the lasting rhetorical practices it takes to be remembered.

⁵¹ Bradley, 'Darwin's Sublime' p. 225.

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