



Darwin's on the Origin of Species: A Modern Rendition

Daniel Duzdevich

Olivia Judson, Contributor

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Evolution is an ongoing process, as Charles Darwin famously argued, and so, as would be expected, the English language has undergone radical change since 1859 when Darwin published *Origin of Species*, which still resonates mightily. For the modern-day reader, his convoluted Elizabethan prose and antiquated vocabulary is a heavy load.

The modernized version provided by Daniel Duzdevich, a doctoral student of biology at Columbia University, doesn't meddle with Darwin's theories or basic exposition and so his edited *Origin* remains a weighty trek, but he has made the way a lot smoother.

A foreword by Olivia Judson, a science journalist, explains how the book transformed scientific thought, even before there was even a foggy notion of the age of the planet (4.6 billion years, by modern reckoning). Darwin's work came as "a huge blow to human vanity," she writes, because before that "we humans considered ourselves the pet creations of a deity."

Random comparisons between Duzdevich's rendition and the original indicate that he is a lighthanded editor. In the summary chapter, for instance, the only change is to substitute "while" for "whilst" in a key sentence, which reads as follows: "There is grandeur in this view (evolution) of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, while this planet has gone cycling 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."

THOMAS BEVIER (Spring 2014)

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