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## Review of Joseph Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice* and Virginia Richter, *Literature After Darwin: Human Beasts in Western Fiction, 1859-1939*.

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**Joseph Carroll**, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice*. New York: SUNY Press, 2011. 368 pp. ISBN 9781438435220.

**Virginia Richter**, *Literature After Darwin: Human Beasts in Western Fiction, 1859-1939*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 272 pp. ISBN 9780230273405.

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**1.**

The year 2009 was the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*; it was therefore named the "Darwin Year" and was celebrated all over the world by academic conferences and events targeting the general public. The celebrations marked the extreme "actuality" of Darwin work and the persistent relevance of the questions he raised: not only about "Man's place in nature," but also about the connections and relations between "nature" and the human realm of "culture." Darwinism today informs and shapes our culture in a way very similar to Freud: regardless of how skeptically we may treat their theories, we have become constitutionally incapable of overlooking their basic concepts—in science, academia or popular culture—so that these form the matrix of the prevalent interpretations of the world. Virginia Richter thus opens her book: we are all post-Darwinian the way we are all post-Freudian (1).

In this sense, it is a platitude, if not indeed a pleonasm, to state that Darwinism has informed, implicitly or explicitly, literary works from the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. However, at least from the 1980s onward, Darwinism has also entered the "theoretical" field of literary interpretation, and has given form to a "new approach" to literature: literary Darwin studies or literary Darwinism. This new interdisciplinary field combines history of science and new scientific developments with philosophy and literary and cultural studies, and has seen an incredible expansion in the past fifteen years. It has also produced litigious and controversial stances: if some interpreters have "simply" integrated Darwinian theories and concepts into the heterogeneous tool-box of literary interpretation, others have seen the rise of literary Darwinism as alternative to, and incompatible with, the whole discipline of literary studies based on the tradition which spans from Russian formalism to structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, etc. Two new books published in 2011, Joseph Carroll's *Reading Human Nature* and Virginia Richter's *Literature After Darwin*, exemplify these opposing positions and can thus be read together as introductions to this new interesting and controversial field.

**2.**

Joseph Carroll can be considered a pioneer and founder, since his 1995 book *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), by rejecting "the follies of poststructuralism" (x), established literary Darwinism as a new, independent, self-sufficient and alternative discipline of literary interpretation. In 2004, his book *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature and Literature* collected the essays from 1995 to 2004, and now the new book, *Reading Human Nature*, collects twelve new essays from the following years. The essays are grouped in four parts, which display the full scope of research in evolutionary literary study:

theory, interpretive criticism, empirical research and intellectual history, and, therefore, constitute an extensive, articulated and effective introduction to the field.

The first section, "Adaptationist Literary Theory," presents and extensively explores the history, aims, scope and limits of the evolutionary paradigm for literary study. As Carroll recalls in the brief introduction, as a young scholar in the late 1970s and 1980s he was extremely dissatisfied with the prevailing schools of literary interpretation, which he groups under the banner of "poststructuralism." He found the theories derived from Derrida, Foucault and de Man "incoherent, not just illogical but overtly hostile to the principles of rational order that are a common heritage for descendants of the Enlightenment" (ix), and therefore pursued historical scholarship. It was reading Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* in the early 1990s that made clear to him that "all things human are contained within the scope of biological evolution" (x), where "all things human" include the products of human imagination. He thus set out to build a new framework for literary study based on an evolved and adapted human nature, giving due heed to biologically grounded motives, passions, and forms of cognition.

The axiom of this new discipline is that "there is nothing in life outside of evolution" (82), and thus "all forms of behavior can be traced to the only possible source of all behavior: the interaction between genetically transmitted dispositions and specific environmental conditions" (84). The hinge around which the new discipline must revolve is a notion of "human nature" as constituted by the "motives and passions that have derived from an adaptive evolutionary process" (84). Cultural formations, and more specifically human imagination, depend on genetically mediated dispositions of human nature interacting with specific environmental conditions, so that a true understanding of any given cultural formation must locate it in relation to the elemental, biologically based characteristics that shape all cultures. Culture, in other words, does not stand apart from the genetically transmitted dispositions of human nature; rather, it is "the medium through which we organize these dispositions into systems that regulate public behavior and inform private thoughts. Culture translates human nature into social norms and shared imaginative structures" (17). Intuitive perceptions of the motives and passions that constitute human nature are products of "folk psychology": the common, shared basis for the understanding of intentional meaning in other human beings. Folk psychology, Carroll writes, is the "lingua franca of social life and of literature" (84). Literary interpretation is grounded on the understanding of this "folk psychology" and must align itself with basic evolutionary principles: "survival, reproduction, kinship (inclusive fitness), basic social dynamics, and the reproductive cycle that gives shape to human life and organizes the most intimate relations of family" (80).

This leads to the more controversial thesis of the literary Darwinists: the adaptive function of literature. Imagination, for Carroll's brand of literary Darwinism, is considered a functional part of the adapted mind, part therefore of a larger, systemic structure of species-typical adaptations; literature and the arts produce subjectively mediated images of the world and of our experiences in the world, which help in organizing motivational systems disconnected from the immediate promptings of instincts. This is thus the adaptive function of the arts: "literature and the other arts help us live our lives. That is why the arts are human universals. In all known cultures, the arts enter profoundly into normal childhood development, connect individuals to their culture, and help people orient to the world, emotionally, morally, and conceptually" (27).

This new field must constantly be assimilating new research in the evolutionary human sciences and especially in evolutionary psychology, and almost absorb the language and methods of the natural sciences. Evolutionary biology becomes the pivotal discipline uniting hard science with the social sciences and the humanities: "science" as such must be based on a shared, empirically developed model of human nature; moreover, all disciplines, including the humanities, will have to adopt a "scientific"—that is, empirical—methodology. The scientific ethos and a quantitative methodology are the only way, Carroll argues, to produce "new knowledge," which must meet minimally adequate standards of empirical validity. Literary studies, too, will have to be based on "empirically grounded findings in the evolutionary human sciences" (85) and adopt the "rigorously quantitative, empirical methods that now prevail in the sciences" (86).

The emphasis on empirical methodology and the need for "new knowledge" involves a strong and unconditional rejection of all other forms and schools of literary interpretation. The other "schools," which Carroll regroups under one banner, "cultural constructivism," cannot come to terms with the reality of an evolved and adapted human nature. "Cultural constructivism" is the idea that "culture exercises autonomous causal force in human thought, feeling and behavior" (38) and is thus not constrained by innate dispositions. This is a stance that for Carroll is kin to creationism (65). Foucauldian cultural critique is singled out as the apex and dominant current of contemporary literary studies: it is based on the understanding that the foci of cultural representation are highly variable and that these variations subserve social and political interests, and that each variation has its own specific imaginative quality. It assumes, therefore, the "causal primacy of representation," which means that reality and social identity are "construed," and this is for Carroll "theoretically illegitimate" (80). Literary studies as we know them, Carroll bluntly states, have "abjured" the prospect of gaining "real knowledge" and find themselves in a disciplinary corner; they must therefore place a heavy emphasis on moral and political judgment as the "chief justification for what they do." The rationale for their professional existence must therefore be that they occupy a superior ideological perspective (79). They base their analyses and interpretations on the "obsolete and misleading" ideas from Freud, Marx, and "their degenerate progeny" (85), and self-consciously distance themselves from the "folk understanding" of human nature, thereby losing touch both with biological reality and with the imaginative structures that authors and audience share.

"Constructivist" and biological notions of personal and social identity, Carroll writes, are inherently incompatible: "Biology is too deep, broad and basic to be easily or convincingly depicted as just another semiotic gambit" (78). The one point on which he insists throughout the book is, therefore, that this literary Darwinism is not just one more "approach" or "school," but rather it aims at fundamentally altering the paradigm of literary study by establishing a new alignment among the disciplines in order, ultimately, to "subsume all other possible approaches to literary studies" (5). The goal is what Edward O. Wilson named "consilience" (*Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* [New York: Vintage, 1998]): "an integrated body of knowledge extending in an unbroken chain of material causation from the lowest level of subatomic particles to the highest levels of cultural imagination" (5). This consilience is explicitly an effort toward "reduction," since reduction is the "ultimate aim in all efforts at producing real knowledge": reduction of the multiplicity of surface phenomena to underlying regularities, to a conceptual and causal hierarchy (29). The humanities are instead founded today on a "pluralist metaphysics" which provides nothing but "an endless succession of incomplete and incompatible

interpretive responses to the same finite body of novels, poems, and plays" (80). The "pluralism" defended by the other "schools" is merely the "chronic symptom of theoretical confusion in the humanities" (79). The "consilience" scenario Carroll prospects is exemplified by a telling metaphor: "a world empire in confident possession of the practices and beliefs through which it has achieved unification and mastery" (71). That is, integrating literary study with the evolutionary human sciences means to eliminate and get rid of all other "approaches" and "schools," in a sort of literary-study adaptation of social Darwinism: the survival of the fittest means the elimination of all the others.

The goal is thus to "transform literary study," to renovate it "from the ground up, eliminating the endemic confusion of 'pluralism' and carrying through on the implications of a Darwinian vision" (82). This renovation is tellingly presented, in the final essay of the first part, through idyllic images of a Brave New World in which high school students will all take introductory courses in statistics, undergraduates will take more advanced courses in statistics and in empirical methodology, and the whole undergraduate curriculum will be much more unified than it is now, with courses in the "social sciences" all integrated from an evolutionary perspective; the evolutionary human sciences will be closely integrated with required courses in evolutionary biology, molecular biology, and the sciences of the brain (85). The concluding metaphor tells it all: in this neo-positivist utopia (or perhaps dystopia), the new scholars will "wake up like kids at Christmas, delighted with the endless opportunities for real, legitimate discovery that are open to them" (86).

### 3.

The second and third sections, "Interpretive Practice" and "Empirical Literary Study," provide practical examples of what this new methodology involves: the three essays composing the second section are devoted respectively to readings of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; the two essays composing the third section are part of a project Carroll undertook with the literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall and the social scientists John Johnson and Daniel Kruger, which aims at producing data—"information that could be quantified and could serve to test specific hypotheses" about a textual corpus (151)—through an internet-based survey about an extensive group of Victorian novels.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is read through an analysis of the conflict between Wilde's homoeroticism and the Christian ethos: Carroll argues that Wilde associates aestheticism with homoeroticism and that he sets aestheticism and homoeroticism against the (Christian) ethos of love and lasting affectional bonds. Dorian Gray's repudiation of love produces the mood of guilt and horror in which the novel culminates. This conflict in the novel, Carroll continues, reflects an analogous and deep division in Wilde's own personal identity, and thus, the essay concludes, "the central artistic purpose in *Dorian Gray* is to articulate the anguish in the depths of Wilde's own identity" (108). *Wuthering Heights* is read instead through the notion of "life history," which describes how the relations among basic biological characteristics (gestation, speed of growth, bonding between mothers and offsprings, dual-parenting, pair-bonding, etc.) form an integrated structure. This structure forms a reproductive cycle which is integrated in the functioning of the social community; with respect to its adaptively functional character, human life history has a *normative* structure. The plot of *Wuthering Heights*, Carroll argues, shows that Brontë was attracted to the values vested in the normative model, "but her figurations also embody impulses

of emotional violence that reflect disturbed forms of social and sexual development" (111). Thus the novel displays the tensions between the motives that organize human life into an adaptively functional system and impulses of revolt against that system: "Brontë's figurations resonate with readers," Carroll concludes, "because she so powerfully evokes unresolved discords within the adaptively functional system in which we live" (122).

The essay on *Hamlet* proceeds by first presenting previous evolutionary commentaries on the play and focusing then on the psycho-symbolic relation between Hamlet and his mother: the symbolic import of the play consists, for Carroll, in a "condensed representation of corruption in the emotional nucleus formed by the relation between mother and child" (139). The two essays in the third part focus instead on readers' response to a set of characters and situations in a literary corpus: for the first study, the four scholars created an online questionnaire, listed about two thousand characters from 201 canonical British novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and asked questions about each character selected; for the second study they limited the questions to one novel, Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The questions revolve around the agonistic structure in the selected novels, and from the data collected and analyzed the authors argue that these novels provide a medium of shared imaginative experience through which authors and readers affirm and reinforce egalitarian dispositions on a large cultural scale. The real goal of the two studies, however, is stated at the very beginning: to "persuade literary scholars that empirical methods offer rich opportunities for the advancement of knowledge about literature," and to "persuade social scientists that the quantitative study of literature can shed important light on fundamental questions of human psychology and human social interaction" (152).

What I believe is important to point out here is that, in both parts, the emphasis on "human nature" means an emphasis on "authorial intentions," on the one hand, and audience response, on the other. Already in the introduction, Carroll states that at the center of his project lies the reaffirmation of three core ideas of traditional (i.e., pre-"postmodernism") humanism: individual identity, authorial intentions, and reference to a real world (x). In the essay on *Wuthering Heights* and in the two "empirical" essays of the third part, the emphasis is instead on readers' responses to the characters. Authorial intentions and readers' responses are analyzed through the matrix of evolutionary biology and adaptive development. Centering the analysis on *biology*, however, means to reduce its scope to *biography*: what remains when we delete "textuality" and "cultural critique" is ultimately a biographical reduction, both of the author's "motives" and of the effects on the readers, which all are part of the "common idiom" of human nature. Sure they are read through the sophisticated lens of the latest research in microbiology and Theory of Mind, but in the end all this "reduction" does is to squeeze new "scientific" content into the old humanistic, pre-"postmodernist" form of literary analysis. That is to say, all literary theory from Russian formalism to deconstruction should be bracketed as if it had never existed, and the "great leap forward" of the new theory appears rather as a step back to old humanistic paradigms of interpretation.

One fundamental question arises at this point: can *all* literature, or even *all* arts, be read through this matrix? Perhaps it is only a coincidence depending on the biographical hazards of his career, but the texts Carroll chooses to analyze in his case studies all belong to epochs pre-dating the modernist caesura; can modernist literature and arts be read this way? And what about

postmodernist works? Can they be "reduced" and squeezed into the Darwinist model, or should they all be condemned like the "degenerate" theories they accompanied and helped to develop? Can Kafka's works be read through the matrix of evolutionary biology and adaptive development? And Beckett's, or Joyce's?

#### 4.

Carroll is extremely critical (and he certainly does not mince words) of the attempts of adapting Darwinian theory to, or of integrating it with, the other "schools" of literary interpretation. On the one hand, he rejects what he calls "vulgar literary Darwinism"—that is, all analyses which merely point to the existence of Darwinian themes in various works of literature—and accuses it of offering a convenient target for critics "eager to dismiss the possibility of evolutionary criticism in its more sophisticated forms" (81). On the other hand, he dismisses any attempt to combine Darwinism with literal/cultural studies and "continental" philosophy (which, as we have seen, for him equates to "poststructuralism"): he singles out three examples, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan, 1983), George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Ellen Spolsky's *Gaps in Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), and argues that, since "poststructuralism yields causal primacy to language," it is incompatible with a "perspective in which 'life', self-replicating DNA, precedes thought, to say nothing of language" (Carroll 78).

Precisely Beer's and Levine's works constitute the inspiration and point of departure for Virginia Richter's *Literature After Darwin*. Long before Carroll's "revolution" (as we have seen, *Evolution and Literary Theory* was first published in 1995), they "carved out the territory of literary Darwin studies" and their books "were landmark studies at the time, espousing Darwin for literary criticism, and initiating an interest in science within literary and cultural studies" (Richter 3-4). Unlike Carroll, whose attacks against "postmodernism" are not only insistent and repetitive, but also constitute an inherent part of his argumentation, Richter devotes only one paragraph of her introduction to stating the difference between "Carroll's brand of literary Darwinism"—which she names a "neo-naturalist approach"—and hers: for Carroll, she writes, "the 'Darwinian paradigm' is regarded as normative, as the only true one. Approaches that do not fit into this paradigm [. . .] are rejected as incoherent, empirically unfounded and plainly misguided." In contradistinction to this approach, Richter claims that, "as an epistemological framework, Darwinism favors unpredictability and asystematicity rather than the endless repetition of the same universal pattern, and is therefore not necessarily hostile to poststructuralist approaches" (6). And she concludes:

If Carroll's axiomatic assumption that nature is the foundation for all cultural activity leads to the conclusion that all literary texts reflect this unvarying nature—that all novels are about sexual selection—then the aesthetic distinctiveness and historicity of literature is completely lost. While I want to explore patterns, connections and genealogical lines in the literature after Darwin, it is also one of my aims to pay due respect to the individual specimens, to the aesthetic singularity of literary texts. (6)

Richter's analysis begins with an observation: Darwin's chief discursive act was the "displacement of 'Man' from the apex of creation," which, together with his denial of teleology, raised the "question of questions": What is Man's place in nature? No longer the final goal of a

divine plan, but just an animal like any other, and moreover the contingent product of natural selection, "man" (much more than "human being") struggled to come to terms with a new status and a new set of questions (3). Literature reflected and enacted this struggle, and explored the possibilities of the new discourse far beyond the boundaries of the scientific method. Richter surveys a number of literary themes and works that appeared in the wake of, and were influenced by, the Darwinian discourse. Her approach is historical and "contextualist," situating the works of fiction in relation to the evolutionary, anthropological, and colonial debates of the time; however, her approach is also "actualist," in the sense that she is interested in the resonance of the Darwinian discourse in contemporary culture and utilizes a number of contemporary—"degenerate" in Carroll's idiom—theoretical tools (just a few names: Agamben, Derrida, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, Ginzburg). The book addresses questions of otherness, diversity and normativity in the literary representations of human-animal relations and the fears sparked by this suddenly precarious relationship. The temporal scope covers mainly British fiction from Victorian time to modernism, and the analysis includes "high" and "popular" literature, thereby showing the continuity as well as the diversification in the literary reception of Darwinism.

Darwinism disrupted the always problematic definition of "man" and gave rise to a pervasive sense of a fundamental category crisis that Richter calls "anthropological anxiety": fears concerning the definition of the human as separate from the non-human, from the animal and the machine. Darwin's work constituted the fundamental catalyst for the expression of these fears, but was not the sole factor: social changes brought about by the industrial revolution, and the contact with other cultures and people through trade and colonialism, created an ubiquitous sense of precariousness regarding the mechanisms of separation which defined the human. If today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the "separation" from our animal nature—"a sense of an irremediable loss of 'nature' in a completely technologised, quantified, and surveyed world" (7)—that feels threatening, for Darwin's contemporaries, on the contrary, it was the idea of "conjunction" that was deeply disturbing. The fundamental assumption that organic forms are not truly fixed, that one form blends into another and that extinct features can resurface, gave rise to widespread fears of "regression" and "degeneration" which turned upside-down the optimistic Victorian ideology of progress. When linked to racial and colonial discourses, these fears gained an even greater urgency: colonialism, Richter writes, "created the space for different scenarios of anxiety" (13) and provided the background for the *spatial* dimension of anthropological anxiety, while Darwinian evolution theory formed the matrix for its *temporal* dimension.

Richter identifies thus two fundamental areas, around which she will then organize the two central chapters of the book: the "anxiety of assimilation," produced by the colonial encounter with the "Other" and thus concerned with a "spatial possibility of de-differentiation" (14), and the "anxiety of simianation," which involves a loss of difference in time, a return to a former evolutionary stage. The anxiety of assimilation is explored in imperial fictions depicting the encounter between European explorers and the colonized peoples, whereas the anxiety of simianation impregnates stories about the development from an ape-like stage to a human stage or back from man to ape. In both cases, the *ape* becomes the central image, a figure for the general dissolution of boundaries brought about by the Darwinian epistemological change. In fact, before approaching the literary works, Richter must spend a whole chapter on this image of the ape and especially on the notion of a "missing link." The chapter provides a short introduction to the development and basic notions of Darwin's theory, and to its social



repercussions, which serves to illuminate the figures of the ape and the missing link as "border figures negotiating the metaphorical space between sameness and alterity" (34). Both ape and missing link are construed like the Freudian *unheimlich* (uncanny), which is threatening precisely because it is familiar. The missing link in particular became the obsession of post-Darwinian debates and therefore also the mark of the contingency and precariousness of boundaries: precisely because it is missing, "the signifier of absence" (53), it can work, in its ambiguity and polyvalence, as the "central organising metaphor" (57) in the novels negotiating the anthropological anxiety.

The core of the book consists of the two chapters analyzing the literary works. The chapter on the "anxiety of simianation" reads fiction from Poe's pre-Darwinian story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," through Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes*, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Stevenson, Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, up to modernism. What Richter looks for here are representations of the ape as man's Other and simultaneously his mirror image, which reunites alterity and similarity and thus represents the division inherent in human identity: "The ape as man's br/other is a 'fiction': it occupies the place in the 'mirror of nature' that signals recognition to the questioning human gaze, but that place is empty—as only the ape is able to see. What the gaze of the ape has to offer humanity is a twisted *anagnorisis*, an anamorphic reflection which questions identity instead of affirming it—which, in the final analysis, discloses death" (Richter 65). However, if in the immediate aftermath of the publication of Darwin's theory this likeness was perceived as threatening, around 1900 this relationship begins to change: modernist fiction, Richter notes, turns the tables and puts the emphasis rather on "the loss of plenitude accessible only in a state of nature" (106). World War I, finally, changes forever the foundations for anthropological anxiety: the destruction wrought by Western "civilization" undermines the assumed superiority of civilized human beings and moves the stress toward a sort of new "anxiety of humanisation" (114), the fears evoked by the destructive technological potential of humanity.

If the anxiety of simianation is the loss of "vertical differentiation," the "collapse of difference on the historical, genealogical axis" (119), the "anxiety of assimilation," explored in the following chapter, is a *synchronic* de-differentiation, the fear of the fusion with the other. The anxiety of simianation is often played out as a journey through time projected onto an individual body, whereas the anxiety of assimilation is represented as a "topographical movement," "a journey through space, from the imperial metropolis to the fringes of empire which, however, may appear as the secret centre: the heart of darkness" (120). The anxiety of assimilation reveals the ambivalence of cross-cultural contacts, which involve both the threat and the temptation of assimilation, simultaneously the fear of, and the desire for, dissolution, diffusion and amalgamation. Though Richter also reads other—minor—works, such as Hatton's *Captured by Cannibals*, Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* and Hudson's *Green Mansions*, the focus of this chapter is set on Burroughs's *Tarzan* series, which epitomizes and reunites, in a way, all the themes and contradictions of the anxiety of assimilation.

The final chapter resumes from the conclusion of the chapter on the anxiety of simianation, and precisely from its transformation, with modernism, into an anxiety of humanization, and from the cultural pessimism which characterized the interwar period. By the turn of the century, the direct influence of Darwinism on the intellectual debates was "on the wane"; however, Richter argues

that a lasting effect of the Darwinian revolution was a "biologisation" of political discourse, with the consequence of the drift toward eugenics and race discourses, up to, as extreme form, the "scientific racism" of Nazi ideology. What is at stake in these texts, Richter underlines, is not so much anthropological anxiety, but what she calls an "anxiety of anthropology": "not a fear that humans might, if things go badly wrong, turn into beasts, but a belief that humans *are* beasts, driven by their innate aggression and destructiveness—that civilisation in an emphatic sense is, and always will be, antithetical to the human animal" (164). This constitutes the amniotic bath for narratives of cultural decline and degeneration, which sound, in Richter's reading, like a warning to us. In fact, this final chapter ends with the "end of humanity" as described in Karel Capek's *The War with the Newts* and thus re-states the importance and urgency of an analysis like the one proposed by Richter. The goal and rationale of this study, as expressed in the introductory chapter, emphasizes that Darwin's questions are still the questions of our time: "By reading literary texts against the matrix of evolution theory, I hope to contribute to a debate that is no less vital to us than the controversy about man's place in nature was to Darwin's contemporaries. At stake are our views on humanity. On our relations to animals and on life itself—the very foundations of all ethical action" (9).

## 5.

Read together, Carroll's and Richter's books certainly do provide a broad introduction to the richness and differences within this interesting field of literary interpretation, but also appear, at the same time, like a *dialogue de sourds*, mainly because of Carroll's adamant refusal of dialogue, exchange and compromise. This *dialogue de sourds* extends far beyond the borders of literary Darwinism and characterizes the old opposition between natural sciences and humanities, which had an explosion—mainly in American academia—with the "Science Wars" of the 1990s (also analyzed by Carroll in a brief chapter), but still rages in the contemporary debate about the "crisis of the humanities." In Carroll's "consilience" scenario, the debate will end only with the disappearance of the "pluralist" dissent, that is, it will end in a monologue; Richter's interdisciplinary, "dialogic" approach appears, however, more fruitful, and is perhaps the only one that really enhances the actuality of Darwin's revolution.