“From so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.”

― Charles Darwin in The Origin of Species, 1859

An exhibition developed and produced by the History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine, and the National Institutes of Health Office of History

Charles Darwin’s 1859 work, On the Origin of Species, was instantly seen as a potent sign of a new science, a new way of conceiving the world. His theory was an immediate threat not just to those who were wedded to an older conception, but to all who relied on a given and settled order for meaning and for power. Emerging just as liberal reforms in western society seemed headed for radical explosion, just as technological change provided a social and economic motor that sped up life beyond all imagining, changes in science portended changes in society: “things fall apart; the center cannot hold.”

That Darwin’s thought could be so fertile should not surprise us. On the Origin of Species evoked life in all its intricacy, fecundity, and creativity. This is the world that Darwin explored and surveyed, described and explained—his enduring legacy to science, and to us.

This exhibition, a celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin (12 February 1809 - 19 April 1882) and the 150th anniversary of the publication of On the Origin of Species (24 November 1859), uses materials from the National Library of Medicine.

Rewriting the Book of Nature will tour around the U.S. beginning in summer 2010.

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Curated by:
Paul Theerman and Michael Sappol

“That Troubles Our Monkey Again” in Fun, November 16, 1862 - Courtesy Yale University Library