

Images of Evolution

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DARWIN'S PICTURES: Views of Evolutionary Theory, 1837–1874. Julia Voss. Translated by Lori Lantz. x + 340 pp. Yale University Press, 2010. \$45.

Charles Darwin thought the graphic expression of his theory extremely important. In *On the Origin of Species*, he recognized the difficulty naturalists had “in describing, without the aid of a diagram, the various affinities which they perceive between the many living and extinct members of the same great natural class.” In spite of this awareness, he included just one diagram of species descent in the book, a very abstract one consisting of a series of bifurcating vertical lines labeled with letters and horizontal lines depicting indeterminate time intervals. Darwin’s abstemious usage might be contrasted with that of Ernst Haeckel, his German disciple and friend, whose two popular treatises on evolutionary theory—*Natural History of Creation* (*Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 1868) and *The Evolution of Man* (*Anthropogenie, oder Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen*, 1874)—were crammed with

trees of descent and replete with illustrations of a huge variety of organisms at various stages of development. The number of pictures in Haeckel’s books grew relentlessly through the 12 editions of *Natural History of Creation* and the 6 editions of *The Evolution of Man*; these volumes were translated into most of the known—and many of the unknown—languages of the world. It is perhaps no wonder that more people by the turn of the century had learned of evolutionary theory through Haeckel’s depictions than even from Darwin’s own writings. Images have power.

Darwin lacked the artistic talent of Haeckel and deployed many fewer illustrations in his several books. Yet as Julia Voss shows in her quite original investigation, *Darwin’s Pictures*, in Darwin’s works visual representations were vital not only for readers’ comprehension but also for his working out



Soon after learning that a crested macaque (*Cynopithecus niger*) that chuckled when petted had arrived at the Regent’s Park Zoological Garden, Darwin hired artist Joseph Wolf to draw these portraits of the creature and used them to illustrate his 1872 book *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. From *Darwin’s Pictures*.

