JHB's "New Developments in Darwin Studies?" Redux

Karen Rader¹ · Marsha Richmond²

Accepted: 22 October 2021 / Published online: 8 November 2021
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2021

At significant commemorative moments in Darwin's life and historiographical reassessment, historians of biology have made attempts to consider the past, present, and future of Darwin studies. In 1982, Janet Browne, reviewing Dov Ospovat's now classic book, *The Development of Darwin's Theory: Natural History, Natural Theology, and Natural Selection, 1838–1859* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), noted that a "Darwin industry" had emerged grounded on the availability of new resources—Darwin's archive in Cambridge, definitive editions of his major works and species notebooks, soon joined in 1985 by the publication of the first volume of his correspondence. Browne sounded a hopeful note about the prospects these resources might have for promoting ingenuity in Darwin scholarship: "It would be gratifying to think that the centenary of Darwin's death might be marked by new developments in the 'industry'—by historiographic invention, not necessity."¹ Likewise, in 2021, Erika Milam and Suman Seth concluded their "Descent of Darwin" special Issue of the British Journal of the History of Science's *Themes* with an optimistic sesquicentennial assessment, noting that the essays in their volume "powerfully illustrate" the diversity of ways in which evolutionary ideas have been mobilized, "allowing us to see, with the benefit of historical hindsight, the impossibility of reducing any biological insight to a single social interpretation."²

The coming year will mark yet another milestone in the history of Darwin studies. In addition to the traditional February celebration of Darwin's birthday, which has now become something of an international scientific holiday,³ July 2022 will

¹ Janet Browne, "Essay Review: New Developments in Darwin Studies?" *Journal of the History of Biology* 15, no. 2 (1982): 275–280, on 280.

² Erika Lorraine Milam and Suman Seth, "Descent of Darwin: Race, Sex, and Human Nature," *BJHS Themes* 6 (2021): 1–8, on p. 8.

³ See the *International Darwin Day* website, which initiated the annual International Darwin Day Celebration in 1995. <https://darwinday.org/history/>, accessed 19 October 2021. See also Rachel M. Goodman, "Celebrate Darwin Day, An Event for Education and Outreach in Evolutionary Biology," *Evolution Education & Outreach* 1, no. 3 (2008): 306–311.

✉ Karen Rader
journalofthehistoryofbiology@gmail.com

¹ Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, USA

² Wayne State University, Detroit, USA

mark the completion of the Darwin Correspondence Project (DCP), founded in 1974 by Frederick H. Burkhardt, former president of the American Council of Learned Societies, which is one of the project's major funders. The DCP focused on "locating and researching all known letters to and from Charles Darwin, [and] ... publishing complete texts together with notes and appendices that make them comprehensible to the modern reader."⁴ Since 1985, the *Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (published by Cambridge University Press) has made available, as Sam Schweber noted in his *JHB* review of the first two volumes, "complete and authoritative texts of all the available Darwin correspondence," which are invaluable "not only for depicting Darwin's intellectual development within the context of *his whole life*, but also for understanding the cultural, economic, intellectual, and social context in which these developments took place."⁵ The history of biology has been the great beneficiary of this mammoth scholarly enterprise.

Since its founding in 1968, the *Journal of the History of Biology* has been a flagship outlet for Darwin scholarship. To date, the journal has published 729 articles that either focus on Darwin specifically or mention his work prominently. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that in 2021 *JHB* finds itself publishing in this issue an unintended but interesting confluence of new Darwin scholarship. These articles indeed seem to indicate the kinds of fresh approaches and historiographic ingenuity that the Darwin industry spawned. From our editorial vantage point, this begs for some analytic attention: now that the final volume of Darwin's correspondence will soon be published, perhaps it is a good time to look back on *JHB*'s contributions to the Darwin industry and to reassess Browne's original question in the context of recent historical contributions.

To this end, stay tuned in 2022 for our commemoration of the signal event of the publication of volume 30 of the *Correspondence*. Springer/Nature plans to make available online a series of classic as well as contemporary *JHB* articles on Darwin that will enable historians of biology to assess this query for themselves. These internet-based digital materials will also be framed by short essays that take stock of the recent scholarship on Darwin as well as the role the DCP has played in enriching this corpus. We will welcome your comments and feedback, as the attempt to assess "new developments" around Darwin's ideas continues.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

⁴ "Darwin Correspondence Project," American Council of Learned Societies. <https://www.acls.org/Major-Initiatives/Darwin-Correspondence-Project>, accessed 19 October 2021. See also "About the Letters," The Darwin Correspondence Project, <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letters>, accessed 19 October 2021.

⁵ Sylvan S. Schweber, "Essay Review: The Correspondence of the Young Darwin," *Journal of the History of Biology* 21, no. 3 (1988): 501–519, on 501, 502.