

## Editor's Introduction

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ALICE ANDREWS

I am delighted to introduce the inaugural issue of *The Evolutionary Review*. *TER* was born out of the online journal I created back in 2003, *Entelechy: Mind & Culture*. *Entelechy* published biologically informed poetry, fiction, essays, visual art, and book reviews; its mission was to bridge two separate divides—the humanities and the sciences, and academia and popular culture. But *Entelechy* was so broad in scope that it made me dizzy. After five years and nine issues, my passion and energy for it waned, so I decided to call it quits. Still, it had provided a forum that was unlike any other, and I felt a little guilty about abandoning it. If I were going to regain my ardor for something like it again, I thought, it would have to be something more focused; something that filled an empty evolutionary niche—something that was needed.

What that was, it seemed to me, was a forum for commentary that examined all of life through an evolutionary lens. A vehicle for what I call “evolutionary imagination.”<sup>1</sup> Where could a good Darwinian literary theorist publish a review? Where could an evolutionary psychologist or anthropologist wax poetic or biological about Facebook? And what about film? When I watch a movie, I watch it as an evolutionist. For years I have had my psychology students write papers critiquing films from the perspective of evolutionary psychology. How I longed (and still long) to read a review of *Wall-E* or *Little Miss Sunshine*—or any film—by a brilliant evolutionary psychologist. (See this volume for one such review by Dylan Evans.) I began to characterize the project as *Evolution and Human Behavior* meets *The New York Review of Books*, meets maybe, *The New Yorker*. But the project had two obvious problems. One, it wanted to cross disciplinary boundaries seldom crossed before, and two, the evolutionary model when applied to human affairs is cause for suspicion by many in academia. I lucked out with the new executive director of SUNY Press, Gary Dunham. Without risk-taking, rebel visionaries such as Gary, we don't get an evolutionary review; we don't get a forum for applying evolutionary principles to art and culture.

But there are other more subtle reasons why such a venture might be feared. Despite their tame and somewhat namby-pamby appearances, the disciplines of critical/literary theory and aesthetics are serious business! Authoritative value judgments actually have the potential to shape and influence reproductive

strategies and choices, that is, sexual selection. This is why, in my view, we sometimes get excited and furious over defending a film, painting, or book. We come alive when interpreting, defending, judging, and assigning value or merit to aesthetic cultural products, because these judgments are really, in the end, battles; and not just battles of wit and ego, but blood and gene battles—for what and who survives. Not so namby-pamby.

Michelle Scalise Sugiyama writes that “stories consist largely of representations of the human social environment,” and she argues that “these representations can be used to influence the behavior of others (consider, e.g., rumor, propaganda, public relations, advertising)” (403). For Sugiyama, storytelling is a social exchange where “the benefit to the listener is information about his or her environment,” and the benefit to the storyteller is behavior from the listener that serves the storyteller’s interests. But we can expand on this. It isn’t just the storyteller and listener who benefit: transmitters, promoters, and detractors of stories also benefit. So publisher, editor, and critic *all* have much more at stake (in terms of fitness, i.e., in terms of their genes) than we usually imagine. Now just replace “story” with all the “narratives” in this volume.

*Review* means “to see again,” and what *TER* offers is a chance to do that—to “see again” in a new and fresh way, based on a simple, yet elegant 150-year-old theory (firmly established as science) that is still rejected by a majority of people in the United States and much of the world. In the academic and intellectual world, too, adopting an evolutionary perspective on art and culture is often highly suspect. Many social scientists are critical of the evolutionary paradigm for fear that its implications support racist and sexist ideology. And within a historical context, they have every right to fear this. But many evolutionary thinkers—Peter Singer, David Sloan Wilson, Geoffrey Miller, Helena Cronin, Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Steven Pinker, and E. O. Wilson, to name just a few—have shown us that evolutionary theory can indeed be applied to human affairs with sensitivity to human diversity, commitment to social justice, and an intelligent responsiveness to the challenges of a deteriorating environment. We still need C. Wright Mill’s “sociological imagination,” but we

need to locate it within a kind of imagination that has a richer and deeper explanatory power—the evolutionary imagination.

An evolutionary imagination could move us into new worlds, helping us to develop novel environments that make the most of our evolved psychologies. It could, for example, provide us with information crucial to success in setting up smaller, more closely knit, more sustainable communities. The evolutionary feminist, Helena Cronin, captured this kind of evolutionary imagination a decade ago when she explained that while there is a human nature, “the behavior that it generates is richly varied. Our evolved minds are designed to help us to react appropriately to the different environments that we find ourselves in. It is thanks to our genetic endowment, not in spite of it, that we can generate our rich behavioral repertoire. Change the environment and you change the behavior. So an understanding of the evolved psychology of our species—of our motivations and desires—is vital for political action; we need to know which aspects of our environment have to be altered in order to achieve the desired ends. The task, then, is to understand human nature, not to change it.” (47)

To be sure, without the kind of insight an evolutionary perspective offers us, it will be close to impossible to meet the social, political, and ecological challenges we now face. But an evolutionary imagination is more, still: it also encompasses a poet contemplating a worm, a reader sitting down to imagine the ideas in this volume, and an evolutionist reviewing a film. *TER* provides the space for it all.

It is hard for me to contain my excitement about *TER*. I am not the only one who watched *Slumdog Millionaire* through the lens of natural and sexual selection, nor the only one who thinks about Facebook in terms of our ancestors. There actually is an audience for such evolutionary critiques, and it’s clear to me that this audience will grow. Indeed, it is our hope that *TER* may some day not only speak to those who take an evolutionary lens to our art and cultural products, but to those who don’t yet know of the sharp focus the lens has, nor of its uses, virtues, and many pleasures.

*The Evolutionary Review* could not have evolved as it has without the symbiotic efforts of my brilliant co-editor, Joe Carroll, whose evolutionary imagination is

unparalleled. For friendship and support during the making of this first issue, special thanks to contributors Dylan Evans, Justin Garcia, Leslie Heywood, Tim Horvath, Jiro Tanaka, and David Sloan Wilson. And to noncontributor friends and family: Sophie Andrews, Simon Baron-Cohen, Art Bennett, Charlie Brover, Kay Brover, Nicole Burman, Victoria Coleman, Denise Deagan, Glenn Geher, Megan James-Lopez, Rick Lange, Jeff Miller, Christopher Porpora, David Livingstone Smith, and Jason Stern. And to members of the Editorial Board for their encouragement, inspiration, and feedback—with special gratitude to Brian Boyd, Ellen Dissanayake, Jonathan Gottschall, John A. Johnson, and Steven Pinker. And finally, much appreciation to David Augustus Hart for creating *Argot* just for *TER*, and to everyone at SUNY Press—especially Gary Dunham and Laurie Searl.

#### DEDICATION

This first issue is dedicated to Jim Andrews (the father of my beautiful and wisdom-filled daughter), who didn't live long enough to see this, but who was the first to hear

me utter the words “The Evolutionary Review: Art, Science, and Culture” not very long ago. Jim, I think you'd be proud. —AA

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#### NOTE

1. Satoshi Kanazawa has proposed the term *evolutionary psychological imagination*. “The evolutionary psychological imagination gives you a different perspective on world events, on ‘history,’ by linking it to our ‘biography’.” It allows us to see the universality of human nature, and how our ‘personal troubles’ are the same everywhere. And many of the ‘public issues,’ not only in our own society but in every society, are intimately linked to the personal troubles of people like us” (15).

## Editor's Introduction

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JOSEPH CARROLL

Over the past several years, “literary Darwinism,” evolutionary aesthetics, and evolutionary cultural theory have expanded and flourished, displaying their vitality in numerous articles and books, and gaining ever-increasing visibility not just in academic journals but in newspapers and magazines aimed at the educated lay public. The evolutionists seek to integrate knowledge in the humanities with causal explanations in the evolutionary human sciences. They delineate universal features of an evolved human nature but also give close attention to the way human nature manifests itself differently in different cultural contexts. They trace out the relations between specific biocultural configurations and the particularities of form and quality in individual works of art. In this way, they aim at offering comprehensive explanatory critiques. Contributors to this field include both evolutionary scientists and scholars in the humanities. These two groups are about equally represented in three recent anthologies: *The Literary Animal* (Gottschall and Wilson), *Human Nature: Fact and Fiction* (Headlam Wells and McFadden), and *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader* (Boyd, Gottschall, and Carroll). In explanatory aims and interdisciplinary scope, *The Evolutionary Review: Art, Science, and Culture* follows the pattern set by these previous collections. In style and manner, though, *TER* aims at something rather different.

Most of the writers contributing to this first volume of *TER* are academics. That is, they hold positions in universities. But Alice Andrews and I did not want this to be an “academic” publication. In its most derogatory usage, the word *academic* means writing that is plodding, crabbed, jargonized, dull, and ultimately trivial. The essays in the anthologies mentioned above display no such defects. But even in its more respectful connotations, the word *academic* suggests writing oriented to specialized professional audiences highly tolerant of routine recitations, dry facts, neutral or conventional authorial personas, an impersonal manner, and prose that is merely efficient—not aesthetically pleasing, not expressive or evocative, not, in itself, enjoyable to read. Many of our readers, like our writers, will no doubt have academic appointments. Even so, we determined that we would make pleasure for the reader one of the chief desiderata for contributions to *TER*. We wanted critical reflections that would charm the imagination with wit, humor, and invention, and we wanted prose

that would please the tongue and tickle the ear, satisfying a lust for language that is sinuous, vivid, sharp, and clear.

*TER* is designed to create a specifically evolutionary space for what Matthew Arnold calls “criticism,” that is, “a free play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake” (268). If evolutionary biology offers a true and comprehensive theory of human nature, minds trained in evolutionary thinking should be free to play across the whole field of human concerns, taking pleasure in discovering explanatory linkages but delighting, too, in the subjective, personal quality of their experience.

Alice Andrews had the original idea for this journal. My readiness to join her in the venture can be illuminated by a passage I wrote a couple of years ago, before I knew of her plans for the journal. After giving an overview of evolutionary studies in the arts, I had projected a possible future in which the virtues of the scientific and humanistic disciplines would be united:

Who knows? Perhaps in ten or twenty years, looking back, cultural historians will be denying that the humanities and the evolutionary social sciences were ever in any way at odds with one another. The integration of historical scholarship with a knowledge of human universals will have become standard equipment in literary study. Humanistic expertise in manipulating cultural figurations will have flowed into a smooth and harmonious stream with Darwinian findings on the elemental features of human nature. Humanistic sensitivity to the fine shades of tone and style in literary works will have blended seamlessly with a rigorous empirical analysis of cognitive mechanisms, and a facility in writing elegantly nuanced prose will mingle happily with the severe logic of a quantitative methodology. Scholars and scientists occupied with literary study will balance with easy grace between the impersonal, objective scrutiny of science and a passionate humanistic responsiveness. All of this is possible, and it is worth working toward. Any of it that we can realize will be a gain for ourselves and a contribution to the sum of human understanding. (135)

While envisioning this harmonious integration of critical powers, I was thinking abstractly about the cognitive faculties in themselves. I was not thinking of practical ways of producing a venue for the kind of writing that would fulfill this vision. Alice had the practical vision—the idea of a “review” that would take in the full scope of subjects covered by other high-quality intellectual reviews and by good magazines that give serious attention to politics, science, the environment, culture, and the arts.

Alice and I both knew many evolutionists with lively, cultivated minds; we saw that quite a few humanists have acquired a sophisticated understanding of human evolutionary biology; and we saw too that evolutionary social scientists have become increasingly alert to the peculiarly “human” character of “human nature”—recognizing that culture has a truly exceptional importance for this one species.

The time, then, seemed right. Even five years ago, such a journal might not have been possible. This first volume splendidly demonstrates that evolutionary cultural critique can be wide-ranging, powerful, and subtle. Moreover, we anticipate that the essays in this volume will stimulate critical creativity latent in the minds of other scholars and scientists. A vast territory lies open here for exploration, and the pool of potential explorers has no visible limits. Alice and I have been delighted and often surprised by the contributions to this first volume. We look forward with confidence to many more such pleasant surprises.

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