Some claim Darwin’s theory of evolution is outrageous; others that it’s among the greatest ideas in scientific history. What anxieties are its controversies charged with? What strategies of rhetoric does Darwin’s prose deploy? What changes if we read it as literary fiction? We will explore such questions by studying Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) in the context of nineteenth-century British imperialism, and trace its possible resonances with later texts on the human-inhuman threshold such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), D.H Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), Edward Wilson’s *The Diversity of Life* (1992) and Mahashweta Devi’s ‘Pterodactyl’ (1995). We will review debates on evolution’s tensions with religious beliefs, note the theory’s feeding of fascist and racist dogma – but also admire, hopefully, its illumination of the natural world in the depths of time. Around these materials, and in an inclusive workshop-setting, we will fashion our own acts of critical thinking, speaking, interpretation, listening, and collective conversation.

**Course Objectives**

1) Increased level of comfort and confidence in addressing a group – regardless of the subject  
2) Appreciation of structure and rhetoric, in reading texts as well as in public speaking  
3) An aptitude for dialogue, and for working with differences of viewpoint  
4) The cultivation of personal styles and habits – modifying or even rejecting norms if necessary

**Required Books**

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859)  
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)  
D.H Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (1926)  
Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (1992)  
Files on Canvas

Charles Lyell, extracts from *Principles of Geology* (1833)
Charles Darwin, extracts from *The Voyage on the Beagle* (1839)
Charles Darwin, extracts from *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1882)
John Angus Campbell, 'Charles Darwin: Rhetorician of Science' (1997)
Gillian Beer, extracts from *Darwin’s Plots* (1983)
M.J.S Rudwick, extracts from *Earth’s Deep History* (2014)

Links to Online Videos or Podcasts

BBC, The Big Questions, ‘Is it Time for All Religions to Accept Evolution?’ (Jan 2013)
BBC, The Big Questions, ‘Can the Bible and Darwin both be Right?’ (Oct 2011)
Ian McEwan in conversation with Steven Pinker at the Royal Geographical Society (Sep 2014)
Intelligence Squared, ‘Science Refutes God?’ (Dec 2012)

Assignments

1 individual presentation, of 15 mins, with slides
1 individual presentation, of 15 mins, with a ‘talk-oriented’ 2-page paper
2 group presentations, of 5 mins for each member (this will vary with the class-size)
5 page essay (Times New Roman, font-size 12, double spaced, as final paper)

Grading

Class participation (20%)
‘Talk-oriented’ paper (10%)
Individual presentations (30%)
Group presentations (20%)
Final essay (20%)

Since this course welcomes a diversity of interests, grading will not be based on knowledge of the subject or on English fluency – even as it is meant to improve both. Instead, it’ll reward critical thinking, clarity of structure, a willingness to consider others’ views, and sincerity of engagement.

Attendance

Since we’re concerned with speaking and listening as much as with the subject-matter, being actively present in class is crucial! Emergencies apart, one excused absence is acceptable, regardless of whether or not you’re presenting on the day. If there are religious holidays that are not on Penn’s calendar but are important to you, please let me know at the start of the course.

Academic Integrity

Please look up Penn’s policies on this at:
[www.vpul.upenn.edu/osli/acadint.html](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osli/acadint.html)
and
[http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html](http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html)

Technologies

We’ll mostly stay away from our electronic devices, except when they’re needed for a presentation or for in-class research. If you have particular requirements, please let me know. Your presentations will be video-recorded – only for feedback from me and for your own reference.
**CWiC Advisor**

An undergraduate speaking advisor will be assigned to you; they'll support you as you take this course, with at least two meetings outside class and at least one rehearsal for each presentation. Your interaction with the advisor isn't graded – but, since it's designed to help you, it's mandatory.

**Course Schedule**

Aug 27  
Introduction  

Sep 3  
Charles Darwin, extracts from *The Voyage on the Beagle*  
M.J.S Rudwick, extracts from *Earth’s Deep History* (2014)  

Sep 8  
Charles Lyell, extracts from *Principles of Geology*  
Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Chp 1  

Sep 10  
Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Chp 2  

Sep 15  
Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Chp 3  

Sep 17  
Gillian Beer, extracts from *Darwin’s Plots* (1983)  

Sep 22  
Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Chp 4  

Sep 24  
John Angus Campbell, ‘Charles Darwin: Rhetorician of Science’  

Sep 29  
Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Chp 4  

Oct 1  
Charles Darwin, extracts from *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1882)  

Oct 6  
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, part 1
Oct 8
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, part 2

Oct 13
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, part 3

Oct 15
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, part 4

Oct 20
D.H Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent*, part 1

Oct 22
D.H Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent*, part 2

Oct 27
D.H Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent*, part 3

Nov 3
Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, part 1

Nov 5
Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, part 2

Nov 10
Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, part 3

Nov 12
Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, part 4

Nov 17
Mahashweta Devi, *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha*, part 1

Nov 19
Mahashweta Devi, *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha*, part 2

Nov 24
Mahashweta Devi, *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha*, part 3 & Introduction
Nov 26
Intelligence Squared, ‘Science Refutes God?’ (Dec 2012)
BBC, The Big Questions, ‘Is it Time for All Religions to Accept Evolution?’ (Jan 2013)

Dec 1
Ian McEwan in conversation with Steven Pinker at the Royal Geographical Society

Dec 3
Round-table on essay-ideas and abstracts

Dec 8
Conclusion/backup-session