

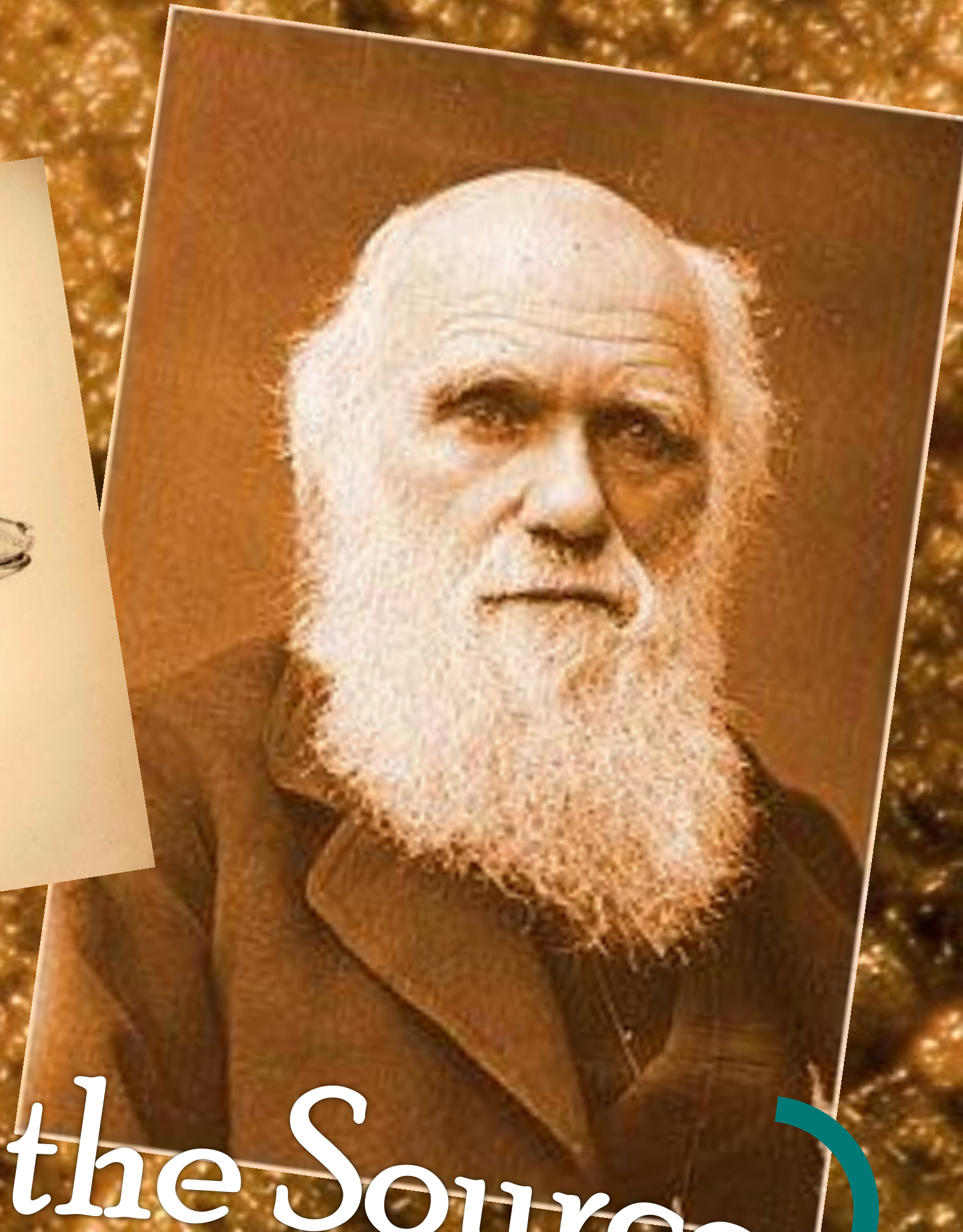
Charles Darwin: Evolutionary Theory & the Theatre

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Questioning the Past

When approaching the assignment of evaluating how a non-theatre person had influenced theatre, I wanted to pick a figure that was also non-traditional. In class, we had studied about political leaders and famous artists had impacted the theatre world, so I wanted to choose someone who was a little bit more outside of the box. Science and theatre are not usually thought of as overlapping very much, so I wanted to dive deeper into the subject. I chose Charles Darwin because I was interested in him as a historical figure and scientist, and I wondered if his life and research had ever reached over to also influence the theatre, as well. I liked the idea of doing research on a person who is not usually associated with the arts world, and seeing how far the link between any influential figure and how it impacts fine arts could reach. I began to ask myself, "If it wasn't for Charles Darwin, what in the theatre would be different?"



Exploring the Sources

I began by looking at the scientist's work in general. If I was going to research his work's impact, I needed to know exactly what his work was. I read about *On the Origin of Species* and how the public and scientific community reacted. Then, I began looking up Darwin in theatre history text books, to see if there was any mention of the evolutionary scientist. A few mentioned him being an influential figure for the Naturalist Movement, so I went from there. I went through a variety of theatre text describing Naturalist Movement characteristics and then I related them back to see how they could have been related to Darwin's own text. From there, I moved on to research about movements that had come out of Naturalism because if Darwin had influenced that, then it also meant his influence reached down the line of movements that came after. Again, I consulted many theatre texts. I looked at how evolutionary theory related to the rise of the director and different acting styles. I studied individual playwrights that cited Darwin as an inspiration and then looked on from there to find other connections. Then, I began to research plays that had been written about the evolutionary scientist and his life and work. I collected information about the 200th anniversary of his life, because many theatrical pieces had been produced in honor of it.

Finding the Answers

By researching this topic, I was surprised to find what an impact Darwin's life had on modern theatre. His work influenced so many different areas of the theatrical world and continues to do so even today. His work inspired everyone from directors to leaders of movement to modern-day actors performing in one-man shows. Whether it was a reaction to his theory of evolution or simply inspiration to create a work about his life, Darwin's impact is substantial. Even though he may not be studied in theatre history courses, or may not even be thought of as influential at all for theatre, Darwin's contributions to theatre stretch from the nineteenth century when his first book was published to present day.

Applying the Findings

So what did this mean for modern day theatre? What I really got out of this project was an adjustment in attitude more than anything else. I learned that as one who studies theatre, I need to keep in mind that nearly all things have an influence on my work. Even though the scientific field is something that is far from fine arts, they still have something in common. They seek to find answers about human existence. We should never count someone out as an influential figure just because their work is different. Charles Darwin's impact on theatre was great, if not accidental.