

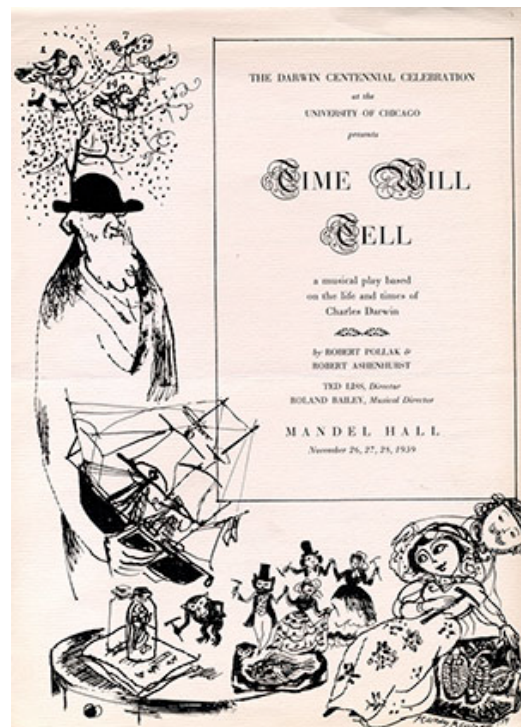
Departments[Features](#)[Observations](#)[Campus Scene](#)[Alumni News](#)[Who, What, When](#)[Class Notes](#)[Saratoga Sidebar](#)**campus scene**[Down and dirty, yet cosmic](#) Prof. Kyle Nichols, landscape scientist[Art and design that jumps of the page](#) Fox-Adler Lecturer Barry Moser[Teaching is a gift, in more ways than one](#) David Porter takes new Tisch Professorship[Bringing the constitution into the classroom](#) Prof. Beau Breslin wins teaching prize[Autumn greening](#) North Woods and other eco-projects[Hispanic heritage](#) Author Junot Diaz keynotes Raices observance[Tracing Darwinian disquietude](#) Phi Beta Kappa talk on evolution in pop history[Campus opens up for big weekend](#) Celebration Weekend welcomes families and alumni[Sportswrap](#) Fall sports highlights**Tracing Darwinian disquietude**

A “Darwin industry” took root soon after the 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species*, and it’s still going strong, according to distinguished science historian Betty Smocovitis. Not only has the father of evolutionary theory been praised and panned in some seventy biographies; he’s been the center of cartoons, ads, and comic songs. With 2009 marking his 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of *Origin*, Skidmore invited Smocovitis as its Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar this fall. A professor of history and zoology at the University of Florida, she met with Skidmore classes and gave a public lecture on Darwinian references in popular music.

Darwin’s theory rocked the scientific world; because it was so widely popularized, it also rattled the mindsets of laypeople. Its blurring of the line between animal and human and its nonconformity with Biblical timelines and Creation stories were “profoundly disquieting” for many people, Smocovitis said. Discussing some examples—and playing vintage recordings—of parlor songs about Darwinism, she argued that their silliness

and satire subverted the authority of the ideas and may have relieved people’s anxiety about them. Challenging Darwin’s challenge to long-held religious (and often racist) assumptions, sheet music and early gramophone records popularized songs like “You Can’t Make a Monkey Out of Me” and “In Darkest Africa.” ([Click here](#) for the link to an audio clip.)

Over the years, of course, people have grown more comfortable with the implications of evolution. Still, Smocovitis recounted how the University of Chicago’s academic symposium for the 1959 Year of Darwin made headlines with its musical-comedy production *Time Will Tell*. And she cited this year’s touring performance by anthropologist Richard Milner in *Darwin Live and in Concert*, featuring songs like “When You Were a Tadpole and I Was a Fish.” Perhaps *homo sapiens* will take



awhile to evolve beyond its last vestige of ambivalence? —SR

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