

Sam Stewart

When P. Thomas Carroll first entered the room to be interviewed, I will admit that I began to fear the worst; that the boredom would cause my eyes to fall into the back of my head and down my throat, asphyxiating the very life out of me. And yet, as I soon learned, the greatest stories are the ones that take you by surprise, for the life of P. Thomas Carroll is a fascinating story. Born on Albert Einstein's 70th birthday, it was as if Carroll was destined to help humanity. You see, what is truly interesting about Thomas Carroll is that, while he is a scientist, he has by no means kept himself confined to the bland world of numbers and calculations. Indeed, like me, Carroll took a keen interest in the tales of old, the foundations of our present. The key to understanding the future is to understand the past. Oh yes, P. Thomas Carroll was fascinated by American cultural history.

I confess that math and science have never been my favorite subject areas (my school-focused nightmares can attest to that), so to hear that this particular scientist had taken such an interest in history piqued my curiosity. You see, I find people to be the most interesting things in this world. We have waged epic wars, created gods, and even built towers that touch the sky. To study history is to study what makes us human. So, how was it that this man of science, a field that emphasizes rationality and reason above all else, could have spent a large portion of his career researching a subject devoted to the often irrational behavior of human beings? Well, as I soon learned everything in this world is connected. In fact, it was downright ignorant of me to assume that science and social studies must be mutually exclusive.

Carroll stated that he was especially interested in one individual in particular: Charles Darwin. He realized that, while he was spellbound by Darwin's theories, he knew very little about the man. Thus he began to do more research. In truth, I was very happy to hear about what he had uncovered for I too find Darwin to be one of the most captivating characters in history. What Carroll had uncovered only added to my intrigue. As it turns out, Darwin had planned to write Origin of Species only as a sort of preface to a much larger book he planned on publishing. Unfortunately, Darwin died before he finished it, a result most likely attributed to the fact that he waited almost twenty years after making his revolutionary discovery to publish the Origin of Species. That is what I, and Carroll, find most interesting about Darwin. He had one of the most ground-breaking theories on the tips of his fingers and yet the fear of being wrong, or even of the theories' religious implications, kept him from releasing it. Carroll sifted through letters, notes, and diaries to uncover more about Darwin's life and, by extension, his theories.

Towards the end of the interview, Carroll warned us that if someone tells you they know you're wrong because they were there when it happened; do not be so quick to surrender. While the individual certainly may have been in the room when said (hypothetical) event occurred, they were only watching from one particular viewpoint. You, on the other hand, are looking at the scenario with a clear, objective eye; you have the ability to see what happened from every viewpoint, not just the one. Therefore, history is an aid to not just social studies, but science as well. As Thomas P. Carroll demonstrated with his research of Charles Darwin, by looking back in time at the man (or woman; no sexism here) behind the science, we can better understand the theory.