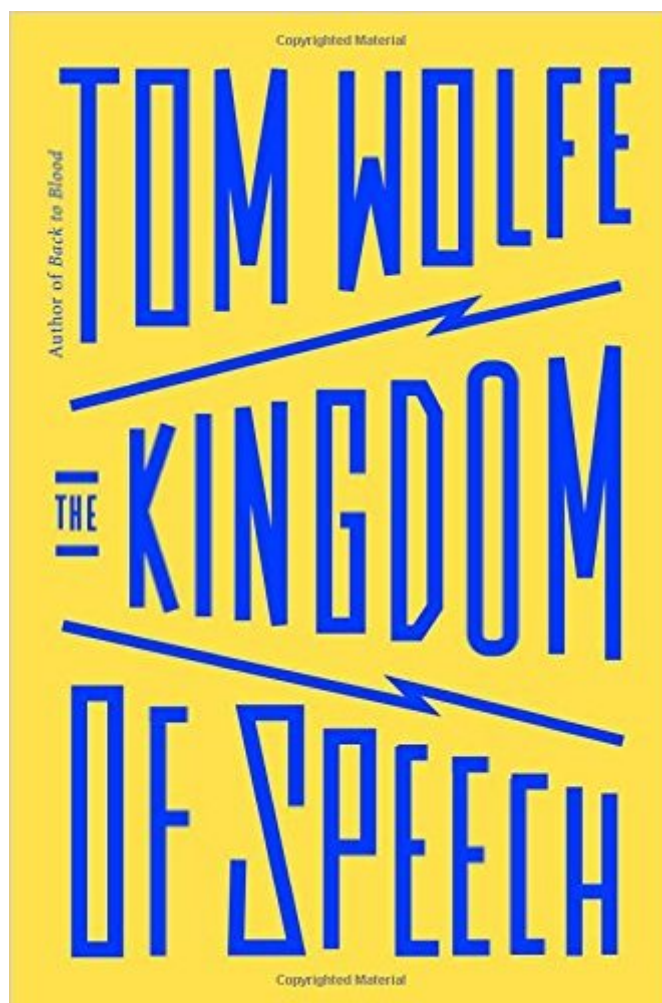


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The Kingdom Of Speech



Synopsis

The maestro storyteller and reporter provocatively argues that what we think we know about speech and human evolution is wrong. Tom Wolfe, whose legend began in journalism, takes us on an eye-opening journey that is sure to arouse widespread debate. *THE KINGDOM OF SPEECH* is a captivating, paradigm-shifting argument that speech--not evolution--is responsible for humanity's complex societies and achievements. From Alfred Russel Wallace, the Englishman who beat Darwin to the theory of natural selection but later renounced it, and through the controversial work of modern-day anthropologist Daniel Everett, who defies the current wisdom that language is hard-wired in humans, Wolfe examines the solemn, long-faced, laugh-out-loud zig-zags of Darwinism, old and Neo, and finds it irrelevant here in the Kingdom of Speech.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some books get 3 stars because they're mediocre. Others get 3 stars because 25% of readers burn with rage | and everyone deserves to know why they're feeling threatened. In this case, the old-school Darwinists and the linguists are livid. As linguistics is not my field, I'm not qualified to judge Wolfe's claims concerning Noam Chomsky. Nonetheless Wolfe's suggestion that for decades, hardly anyone bothered to seriously research the origin of human language, and that still today we have made discouraging progress on solving the problem | does give one pause. As for Darwinism, I did write a book about it (*Evolution 2.0*) which took ten years of research. *Kingdom of Speech* isn't so much a critique of evolution itself as it is an expose on how much credit Darwin took for work not his own. One weakness of this book is Wolfe does not adequately address what

Darwin did or did not accomplish on the HMS Beagle. One gets the impression from Wolfe that Darwin did a lot less science on the Galapagos than most people think. In any case the true story simply is not clear. One bridge Wolfe does not cross (and I'd be surprised had he done so as this is still not well known) is that cells themselves are linguistic. When confronted with stress, they mutate in linguistic patterns. Readers should search for a TED talk by Bonnie Bassler called "How Bacteria Talk" where she shows how organisms send messages to each other and communicate by exchanging molecules built from syntactical modular elements. There is an entire field in biology called biosemiotics (semiotic = signs and language). The field has two dedicated peer reviewed journals. Notable researchers include Howard Pate, Sungchul Ji and Gunther Witzany. This field goes back many decades.

Tom Wolfe's writing style alone makes the book a good read, as he is a great storyteller. Charles Darwin ruminated on his theory of evolution by natural selection for twenty years before he rushed to publish it when he learned that another naturalist, Alfred Wallace, was thinking along the same lines. Wolfe is at his best when describing the cunning intrigue that Darwin, Charles Lyell, and Joseph Hooker used to ensure that Darwin, not Wallace received credit for the theory. Wolfe's central thesis is that language is a uniquely human attribute that shows no signs of being inherited from the animal kingdom. "To say that animals evolved into man is like saying that Carrara marble evolved into Michelangelo's David." - P 169. Wolfe also equates the idea that all animal life is descended from a few cells to Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories. The entire idea is much more about atheistic belief (Tom Wolfe, too, is an atheist) than anything remotely approaching scientific proof. The one thing I found odd about Wolfe's presentation is his criticism of Norm Chomsky's view that human language ability is hard-coded in our genes. "In three decades nobody turned up any hard evidence to support Chomsky's conviction that every person is born with an innate, gene-driven power of speech with the motor running." P. 151 After reading the Kingdom of Speech, I'm more convinced than ever that this is exactly the case. Human language ability is hard-coded in our genes, even if we do not know how. Also, although Wolfe seizes upon speech to argue that humans have not evolved from animals, there are many other characteristics that separate us from animals, which can be used to make the same argument. These include:

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