The struggles of the day rather than the polar ice of night.

The problem here is not with Foucault but with us. The problem now is whether there exists a sufficient will to think Foucault in this way, against the dominant current of fin-de-siècle nihilism which too many folks take postmodernity to mean. Black's still hip, as it always has been for bohemians—but it may be better now for radicals to fade to pink, even against a background almost certainly turning a greyer shade of blue. Little wonder Rousseau wept—only he was crying for himself. Foucault's message, by comparison, is dry-eyed. There is still hope that we can do better.

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**Monkey Business**

*Darwin* by Adrian Desmond and James Moore (Penguin/Michael Joseph). Reviewed by Jose Borghino.

This massive 828-page blockbuster opens with a rhetorical rollercoaster. The preface smacks more of a Hollywood adventure movie (I was reminded of the first 15 minutes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) than the normally staid and anesthetised prose of 'straight' science:

It is 1839. England is tumbling towards anarchy, with countrywide unrest and riots. The gutter presses are fizzing, fire-bombs flying. The shout on the streets is for revolution. Red evolutionists denounce the props of an old static society: priestly privilege, wage exploitation, and the workhouses. A million socialists are castigating marriage, capitalism, and the fat, corrupt Established Church. Radical Christians join them, hymn-singing Dissenters who condemn the 'fornicating' Church as a 'harlot', in bed with the State.

Even science must be purged: for the gutter atheists, material atoms are all that exist, and like the 'social atoms'—people—they are self-organising. ... The science of life—biology—lies ruined, prostituted, turned into a Creationist citadel by the clergy. Britain now stands teetering on the brink of collapse—or so it seems to the gentry, who close ranks to protect their privileges.

At this moment, how could an ambitious thirty-year-old gentleman open a secret notebook and with a devil-may-care sweep, suggest that headless hermaphrodite molluscs were the ancestors of mankind?

The 'gentleman' in question, of course, was Charles Robert Darwin: Cambridge-trained, once destined for the cloth, well-heeled and 'imper-turbably Whig' as Adrian Desmond and James Moore, the authors of this biography, describe him. The son of a Shropshire squire, Darwin can rightly be included with Marx and Freud in a troika of 19th century thinkers whose work still profoundly affects our value-systems today.

Despite some moments of boys-own bravado and rhetorical swashbuckle, the rest of the book rarely redeploy the cinematic gusto of the preface. (Just as well, I can hear Darwin say—he would have been greatly troubled by the sensationalist tone of the above excerpt, the repetition of 'gutter', and the salacious metaphors.)

*Darwin* is an entertaining and (in the best sense) journalistic work which deliberately distances itself from the previous biographies that Desmond and Moore see as "curiously bloodless". By contrast, they try to "re-locate Darwin in his age" by writing a "defiantly social portrait", and they largely succeed.

The science in the book is fairly synoptic—which is understandable for a populist work; but too often Desmond and Moore assume a detailed knowledge of 19th Century British history. At one point, for instance, we are told that Cambridge, where Darwin was studying in 1831, was "gripped by election fever". The historical importance of this particular General Election is emphasised and we are told that the Whig candidates for Cambridge were defeated, but the narrative immediately swerves towards Darwin's preparations for his voyage on HMS Beagle. It takes more than 10 frustrating pages (and six months of narrative time) for Desmond and Moore to let slip parenthetically that the Whigs had been returned to power. This is not suspense, it's an editorial slip—especially when all that was needed was a three-word sentence, 'The Whigs won'.

Desmond and Moore have utilised the flood of primary material recently unleashed by the Darwin Industry: Darwin's secret notebooks have been transcribed and his published *Correspondence* has reached Volume 7 of the 14,000 known letters from and to him.

This new material reveals a fascinating picture of science as an institution
in the 19th century. Science, at the beginning of that century, was the domain of the dilettante or self-financing gentleman-scholar, and it was not until mid-century that youngbloods like T H Huxley could begin constituting themselves as professional 'scientists'; a respectable white-collar body providing the public with a service—instruction—and a commodity—knowledge. Early 19th century science lay in the hands of country curates and lecturing parsons whose excursions into biology or geology were financed by the remnants of a feudal system of privilege, inheritance and elitism. The young Turks like Huxley wanted to sweep the academies clean of the old, amateur spider-stuffers once and for all. This was a time when 'bourgeois' meant radical or even revolutionary, when capitalism was the new threat to tradition, and when liberalism was a dirty word to the powers that be; not the term of approbation it is in our New World Order.

Darwin's relationship to this power structure was always schizophrenic. He was the grandson of a professional (Doctor Erasmus Darwin) on one side, and of the archetypal English entrepreneur of the Industrial Revolution (Josiah Wedgwood) on the other. Darwin's was not a background of titled inheritance, but it was elite nonetheless. At the same time, his family on both sides were Whigs and Dissenters—which was as freethinking as Protestants got without being socialists or atheists.

Darwin was consequently both inside and outside the establishment. He slipped easily into the Cambridge old-boy network, and the relatively easy life of a doctor or a country parson constantly beckoned in his early years. Even as he worked through the revolutionary implications of his ideas on 'transmutation' he panicked lest they be found out and his life ruined by scandal.

These cowardly moments present the least sympathetic portrait of Darwin—moments where he abandoned old friends because they were tainted by radical or heterodox ideas, all the while knowing that his own ideas were dynamite. But there is also something admirable in Darwin's persistent, exhaustive accumulation of evidence from everywhere and anywhere. The way he won over contemporaries such as Lyell, Hooker and Huxley, and then used them as the vanguard in his assault on Creationism and other theories of evolution is described in conspiratorial terms worthy of Vlad Lenin and the lads in November 1917. (Or is the better analogy Stalin on the inside worming his way to the top?)

In 1859 Darwin finally went public with his theory after 20 years of subterfuge. Desmond and Moore's 'social relocation' of Darwin highlights two things at this moment. First, the ground had been prepared and the time was exactly right; second, Darwin's theory would have been impossible to conceive without the technological, communicational and financial advantages afforded a white, upper middle class male living in the most industrialised nation on earth, directly plugged into the network of political and intellectual power.

By 1859 many scientists and thinkers accepted that species were mutable. Darwin's effrontery lay in hypothesising a mechanism to explain the transmutation of species which relied not only on 'capitalist' notions of cutthroat competition and the survival of the fittest, but also on the assumption that transmutations were randomly generated and not reliant upon any God.

Unfortunately, Desmond and Moore never go beyond pointing to some unresolved problems with Darwin's theory of evolution. If a reader wants to explore the science itself and modern reflections on it, they would do better to read Stephen Jay Gould (any of his books, but especially Wonderful Life or Ontology and Phylogeny). And if they want to learn about the implications of Darwinian theory for human beings they should read Jared Diamond's Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee. No-one will pass a test on Evolution as a result of reading Darwin.

Desmond and Moore meticulously document Darwin's home life. Ironically for a man who singled out inbreeding as a major danger to the health of species, Darwin married his first cousin. Three of his ten children died prematurely, and he was racked by guilt for having passed on his own sickly constitution. Far from focusing exclusively on the public results of his theorising, Desmond and Moore contrast Darwin's reclusive, essentially boring lifestyle against his brilliant and tenacious work on (believe it or not) barnacles, pigeons and earthworms, as well as his manic rushes to local quacks for 'water therapy', and the profound grief he felt at the death of his children.

Publishers have recognised their appeal for years, but what is it that draws readers to massive biographies like this one? The Colombian writer Gabriel García Marquéz once said that every human has three distinct lives: the public, the private and the secret. Biographies always weave the public and the private together, but I think they work best when they also offer readers a glimpse of the secret life of another human being—the doubts, the fears, the barely expressible desires.

Desmond and Moore have made a start on unveiling the secret life of Darwin. But their method precludes them from going much further. I began this review with an excerpt from the preface to Darwin. The question that ends that excerpt is a rhetorical one—the answer is predetermined by Desmond and Moore's methodology. Their 'social biography' cannot help but explain Darwin's theories as the product of his times, of his upbringing, and of those contemporaries he read—in short, of his material circumstances and ideology.

Shave away the mountains of detail and the seductive detours in Darwin and we are left with a reductionist portrait of Darwin as himself a 'social darwinist'—a product of his age who merely projected onto the natural world the market-driven, bourgeois, free-for-all ethos which he had been brought up to accept as inevitable (and even desirable) in the human world. Perhaps I am being reductionist myself in distilling 828 pages to this bare paragraph, but I think there remains a lot more to be said (psychologically, at least) about the Shropshire squire whom Ruskin once mocked as having "a deep and tender interest about the coloured hinder half of certain monkeys".

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