INTRODUCTION

New Perspectives on Darwinian Commemoration

Joel Barnes and Ian Hesketh

On the morning of Tuesday, August 15, 2023, amid a carefully cultivated media spectacle, the historic three-masted Dutch schooner *Oosterschelde* embarked from Sutton Harbour in Plymouth, on England's south coast. Heading southwest toward the Canary Islands, the ship commenced a two-year, round-the-world voyage following a simplified version of the route sailed by HMS *Beagle* in 1831–1836. The vessel was the centrepiece of Darwin200, an environmental conservation project that aimed to "reconnect people across the planet with nature to build a more sustainable future." Stopping at almost all of the major ports visited by the *Beagle*, the Darwin200 project took on board around one hundred conservationists aged eighteen to twenty-five for a week each, helping them build leadership skills and providing a global platform to share research on endangered and threatened species and habitats.[1] The project is one of the latest commemorations of the life and work of Charles Darwin (1809–1882), here placed in service of a mission of environmental conservation and planetary stewardship, reflecting Darwin's significance to our understandings of the natural world and the global reach of his scientific theories.

Similarly, each year since the mid-1990s Darwin admirers have celebrated International Darwin Day on Darwin's birthday, February 12. Although Darwin Day is now recognized by diverse groups

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around the world, its origins are with the humanist movement in the Bay Area, California. According to the Darwin Day website hosted by the anti-creationist National Center for Science Education, the celebration aims "to inspire people throughout the globe to reflect and act on the principles of intellectual bravery, perpetual curiosity, scientific thinking, and hunger for truth as embodied in Charles Darwin."[2] Here is Darwin remembered as a secular saint, a heroic scientific crusader against religious credulity and arcane superstition.

Darwin's legacy was cast in yet another light during another recent anniversary, the sesquicentennial of *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), marked in 2021. In this case *celebration* is hardly the right word, as commentators in scholarly and popular publications drew attention to the more fraught legacies of *The Descent of Man* where "questions of race, sex, class and sexuality" were naturalized into Darwin's evolutionary system and subsequently informed social, political, and scientific discourses about these issues.[3] A key influence on this perspective is Evelleen Richards's formative analysis of Darwin's theory of sexual selection, which argues that the theory was heavily indebted to Victorian stereotypes of race and gender as well as Darwin's own commitment to a belief in the hierarchy of races that he came to accept during his so-called savage encounters while on the *Beagle* voyage.[4]

The three Darwins remembered in these recent commemorations have little in common, though all three events reference the same man, the same scientific career, and the same body of written work. Together these cases illustrate the remarkably protean meaning of Darwin and his science to different social, cultural, scientific, and national groups, dependent largely on the given context of time and place within which he has been remembered. This volume takes a historical and global view of such commemorations and memorializations since the moment of Darwin's death on April 19, 1882, by which time he had become a scientific celebrity.[5] Since then, commemorations organized in different parts of the world have celebrated—and at times critiqued—various aspects of Darwin's scientific, social, religious and philosophical impact. Commemorative events, activities and publications have been occasions for the casting and recasting of narratives of the history of evolutionary science, spurs to new historical research, and episodes in the public legitimation of contemporary scientific developments. They have engendered much discussion and debate about

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relations between evolution and religious belief as well as political questions related to issues of nation-building and social development.

Situated in a global frame, this volume reexamines key moments in British and American scientific cultures, while also expanding the geographic scope of the literature on Darwin commemoration to Canada, Australia, Japan, China, Ecuador, and Argentina. Reaching from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century, the chapters together canvass scientific commemoration in its many guises, showcasing the different functions and effects of commemoration in various social, political, religious, and disciplinary contexts, while drawing generic connection between end-of-life memorializations such as obituaries and eulogies, and later celebrations such as centennials and other anniversaries.

Commemoration—or perhaps more broadly memorialization—in this volume takes many forms. As editors, we have not sought to impose on contributors any definitions of *commemoration*, *memorialization*, *celebration*, and the like, leaving authors to interpret these concepts as seems most useful for their respective topics and research interests. Some chapters focus on major commemorative events, others on publications that served commemorative or memorializing functions. Across the wide range of commemorative activities and artifacts are public events and gatherings, comprising lectures and other forms of science communication; academic symposia and their resulting publications; special issues of scholarly journals and popular publications; biographies; busts, statues, and other built monuments; museum displays and exhibits; stamps and maps; radio and television programs; and practices of naming features of the built and natural world, such as streets, islands, bays, and inlets after Darwin. Often such memorializations have been celebratory, but this is by no means universally the case, with some "commemorations" critiquing aspects of Darwin's work or legacy, or forming part of scholarly conversations in which aspects of Darwinian science are the subjects of critical debate.

The Development of Darwinian Commemoration

Since the 1990s, and with some scattered work going back at least to the early 1970s, historians of science have paid significant attention to commemorations and public celebrations as historical moments that tell us much about the relations between science, its pasts, and its pub-

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lics. Growing interest in such topics among historians of science in the late twentieth century was part of a wider emergence of commemoration as a historical and sociological subject. This development was sparked by what Pnina Abir-Am calls the "commemorative mania" of the 1980s and 1990s, most notably the 1989 bicentennial of the French Revolution and the 1995 half centennial of the end of World War II.[6] It was then recognized that commemorations needed to be understood as social and political activities that, in the words of John Gillis, involve "the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation."[7] As much of the interest in historical commemorative activities was then prompted by the expansion of contemporary commemorative events, work in the history of science developed alongside ethnographic and sociological approaches to scientific commemoration, and, more broadly, alongside the emergence of memory studies as a distinct field.[8] Much has been said about how commemorations helped to invent traditions in the modern period when constructing national and imperial identities became central in a period of nation-building and total war.

Indeed, as Roland Quinault argues in his 1998 study of the "cult of the centenary," centennial celebrations in particular are a specifically modern form of cultural remembrance. Focusing mainly on British political culture, with some nods to other Western contexts, Quinault identifies centennial events emerging in the late eighteenth century, but not being common until the middle of the nineteenth century, after which they proliferated with increasingly frequency.[9] And, as he points out, such centennial events were often a reflection of a new figure that emerged at this time, the secular hero who was celebrated in Auguste Comte's positivist scheme that proposed renaming the months after prominent figures or who was quite literally worshipped by Thomas Carlyle as the driving force in historical progress.[10] "Great Men" as diverse as Oliver Cromwell and Edward Gibbon were therefore celebrated in the nineteenth century, not just with commemorative events but also with the publication of scholarly works and biographies to contribute to the public's understanding of their prominent place in British history. That such contributions to historical scholarship became more central to celebrations of the secular hero toward the end of the nineteenth century reflected, according

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to Quinault, the rise of history as a professional discipline of knowledge alongside "changing public attitudes towards the past."[11] Similarly, as the contributors to a 2015 collection edited by Pieter Dhondt have shown, it was in the nineteenth century that the writing of the history of universities—institutions closely connected to many of the themes of this volume—became decisively linked to their celebratory jubilee moments.[12]

There is a compelling symmetry between the development and increasing frequency of centennial celebrations and Charles Darwin's life, which spanned most of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Darwin began to devote himself to natural philosophy at a time when Isaac Newton was being heralded as the ideal man of science, not just for his sublime scientific discoveries but also for his moral character that was deemed central in enabling them to happen. And by the time Darwin died in 1882, he received the honor of a public burial in Westminster Abbey alongside Newton in recognition of his own revolutionary scientific discoveries. Darwin's death was thus a commemorative event in its own right. And since he died at the height of Quinault's cult of the centenary, we shouldn't be surprised that Darwin's life and work has been celebrated at regular intervals since his death, with landmark commemorations occurring in 1909, 1959, 1982, and 2009. Whereas 1982 marked one hundred years since Darwin's death, the other dates marked 50, 100, and 150 years, respectively, since the publication of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (and also 100, 150, and 200 years since Darwin's birth). All four were milestones of commemoration and memorialization in the history of science. That said, each reflected very different cultural contexts in the historicization of Darwin and his work.

The events in 1909, for instance, reflected a period in the reception of Darwin and Darwinism that Julian Huxley referred to as "the eclipse of Darwinism," when the theory of natural selection had been overtaken by non-Darwinian mechanisms of evolutionary change along with a new theory of heredity that at the time seemed to be incompatible with Darwinian evolution.[13] Darwin was therefore celebrated for his important work in making evolution a viable science of life, but his importance in shaping and influencing the work of contemporary evolutionists was deemed rather limited. At the same time, the 1909 events followed the trend of other commemorative events of the period by contributing to historical scholarship, notably in the

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form of monographs, essay collections, and transcriptions of Darwin's previously unpublished 1842 and 1844 manuscript sketches.[14]

The celebrations of 1959 (and to an extent of 1958, the centennial of Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace's initial announcement of the theory of descent with modification by natural selection) signalled a very different historical reality in the reception of Darwinian evolution.[15] By then the synthesis of natural selection and genetics that had occurred in a range of scientific disciplines seemed to vindicate Darwin's original theory of evolution as stated in the first edition of the *Origin of Species*. And as Vassiliki Betty Smocovitis shows in her formative article on the subject, the key commemorative events at the University of Chicago were about institutionalizing this reality while generating new fields of research for the synthetic paradigm.[16] While the Darwin Centennial Celebration at the University of Chicago was largely devoted to establishing this new scientific orthodoxy, 1959 is also recognized as a watershed in historical scholarship on Darwin that ultimately generated what came to be called the "Darwin Industry."

By contrast, as has been carefully documented by Richard Wassersug and Michael Rose, in 1982 almost one hundred commemorative events took place around the world.[17] These celebrations were largely uncoordinated, however, which led to misapprehensions that such events were few and far between, even that the centennial of Darwin's death received "scant notice."[18] Interestingly, as Wassersug and Rose note, whereas the European celebrations tended to focus on the broad sociopolitical meanings of Darwinism, the Anglo-American events, which were more typically based at universities, were more concerned with narrowly scientific issues.[19] At the same time, the authors conclude that taken together the events showed that the Darwin Industry had by this time become a specialized field in its own right, quite independent of evolutionary biology itself.[20]

A little over a quarter century later, the bicentennial and sesquicentennial events of 2009 dwarfed all preceding Darwin celebrations. A list on John van Wyhe's website Darwin Online includes well over five hundred events from around the world, but is far from comprehensive.[21] What this suggests is that Darwin's importance has grown even more since 1982 than it did between 1959 and 1982, and that any attempt to generalize about the 2009 celebrations will require a herculean effort to sift through and analyze the various diverse productions that resulted, from the many conferences and special journal

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issues to the public performances and documentaries. In this regard 2009 still awaits its historian, though already a number of specialized studies have considered particular aspects of the commemorations, such as Alexander Hall's study of British broadcasting at the time and Uwe Hossfeld's work on Darwin celebrations in Germany.[22]

Several historians have also analyzed the 2009 commemorations alongside the earlier celebrations of 1909 and 1959 in different national contexts, as a means of tracing changes in the local memorialization of Darwin over time.[23] Others have used the same dates to track developments in particular themes, such as the memorialization of Alfred Russel Wallace in relation to Darwin, and understandings of relations between "Darwinian" evolution and the supposedly "non-Darwinian" mechanism of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.[24] As David Ceccarelli comments in a recent example of the latter approach, commemorative anniversaries are fruitful spaces for such diachronic conceptual analyses, since as "highly symbolic moments" they have often been used by scholars and scientists "to redefine polarizing categories and renegotiate their conceptual boundaries, possible uses, and implications."[25]

New Perspectives

While there is already established scholarship on Darwinian commemoration, this volume builds on this literature while pointing in new directions in a number of important ways. The most notable is that the volume takes a decidedly global approach to a subject that is normally centered on the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, and in so doing offers genuinely new and surprising conclusions. The collection is not global in the sense of attempting coverage of every possibly relevant locality—notably, there are no chapters here on Africa or the Arab world—but is informed by an approach that sees an expansion of the usual geography, on a scale manageable within a single volume, as constructively highlighting patterns that are otherwise less visible. That expansion, alongside chapters revisiting British and US commemorations, takes in the Anglophone (and Francophone) settler colonies of Canada and Australia, the Spanish-speaking ones of Argentina and Ecuador, and China and Japan. The very thorough coverage of Darwinian commemoration in continental Europe (including Russia) in Thomas Glick and Elinor Shaffer's edited volume *The Literary and Cultural Reception of Charles Darwin in Europe* (2014),

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