

Ustinov's father being her MI5 minder. A hard-drinking, cigar-smoking shoplifter who complained constantly that her funds were inadequate to her extravagant lifestyle, she should perhaps have cut a pathetic figure in old age, but instead was feted as a larger-than-life survivor from a more colourful era. When she moved home in 1963, the story received prominent newspaper coverage. She died at the age of eighty-two, having never produced her much-mooted autobiography.

In its absence, McDonald and Dronfield have done a sterling job in collating all the available information, not excluding her MI5 dossier, and turning it into a solid narrative. Their attempts to enliven their tale with passages of novelistic description are sometimes strained ('Moura parted the heavy curtain and looked out into the evening dark, moving close to the glass to see through the lamplit reflection of her own glittering eyes') and they are reluctant to give a consistent judgement or explanation of her personality. This seems to be partly from a desire to let the facts speak for themselves and partly from a wish to play up key mysteries. Did she use her Cheka connections to have her first husband shot? Did she conspire at Gorky's murder? Did she become pregnant and abort Wells's child, as she claimed, or was this a cover story for a secret trip to Russia? We are left to form our own assessment of Moura and, having done so, to draw our own conclusions about her motives and actions. This leaves the book slightly unsatisfying, but undeniably interesting. For anyone intrigued by the mysterious underside of twentieth century history, it will be a valuable read; for Wells completists, a necessary purchase.

JOHN MCNABB, *DISSENT WITH MODIFICATION: HUMAN ORIGINS, PALAEOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY IN BRITAIN 1859-1901* (OXFORD: ARCHAEOPRESS, 2012), XX + 376 PP. £29.95. [RICHARD PEARSON]

Wells's relationship to the currents of modern scientific thought is complicated. Rapidly evolving theories pervaded the cultural atmosphere of the 1880s and 1890s, and change, twist, new discovery, revision of thesis, were constantly in the air. It must have been something of an intellectual switchback ride itself, and Wells's own modifications to his personal understanding must have been something akin to the progressing interpretations of the future world made by the Time Traveller in *The Time Machine*. John McNabb's meaty and lavishly illustrated volume is an analysis of how anthropological and paeleontological knowledge intersected and became subject to both humanistic, scientific and popular debate in the nineteenth century. It is the kind of book that Wells would have liked. It is erudite, but accessible. It has academic rigour, but is sensitive to the popular reception of academic thought. It is a different kind of book to the

one most scholars of Wells would write: indeed, it has the characteristics of the textbook of the disciplines of archaeology and the social sciences, with tables, drawings, diagrams and maps, summary boxes of ideas or conclusions, and bullet-pointed lists. But its focus is very much the world of evolutionary and palaeontological thought that Wells arrived in when he first stepped through the doors of the Normal School of Science in 1884. It is fascinated with the traces of primitive man and how the Victorians made sense of the new discoveries archaeology, anthropology, and ethnology were revealing in the late decades of the nineteenth century.

The book focuses on the ‘interconnectedness’ of the debates around human origins that encompassed what might be termed the social sciences of the period. McNabb sets out his aims clearly on page 3: Palaeolithic archaeology and the British study of human physical anthropology and human origins; racial theories; geology and climate; and the public reception of these areas of debate. One of his key focuses is on what is termed the ‘eolith debate’ that took place in the years immediately preceding Wells’ arrival on the stage, 1889-1895. (Eoliths are chipped nodules of flint that were thought by some to be the primitive tools of early man and by others as natural geological phenomena). The book is a narrative of the various strands that fed anthropological debates through each decade of the nineteenth century – discussions of well-known figures such as Lyell, Darwin and Huxley, alongside lesser-known names such as the botanist, Joseph Hooker and the archaeologists, Sir Joseph Prestwich and John Evans. It finally reaches the 1880s in chapter 6 and the 1880s/1890s in chapter 7. The second half of the book covers late nineteenth century developments, whilst chapter 12 deals with Wells and chapter 13 with other writers of the period, such as Grant Allen.

The Wells section of the book appears as something of an Appendix to the main body of work. Although McNabb begins his volume with a reference to the Time Traveller and his meeting with the Eloi and Morlocks, the book does not really cover the popularisation of evolutionary theory through fiction until the latter section. McNabb indicates his rationale for these last two chapters – on Wells and on the literary sphere in the mid-1890s, as helping to reveal ‘the concept of public access to information on human evolution’ and ‘a vehicle through which to engage in some of the debates of the time in far greater detail than was possible in earlier chapters’ (15). Unfortunately, this leads to some broad and unsophisticated generalisations: ‘These storytellers were not really bothered with scientific accuracy, they drew on common understandings (folk psychology) of human antiquity’.

Notwithstanding, these last two chapters deal with the popularisation of ideas of evolution and inheritance in the literature of the day, and McNabb devotes a chapter specifically to Wells’s early scientific romances and essay writing whilst making use of a regular conceit throughout his work of the

palaeontologist as Time Traveller. McNabb's chapter on Wells is subtitled 'Resolving the Conflict between Past and Future', and it is through this lens that he tackles the paradox of investigating a writer most often seen as concerned with the future through the debates about the prehistorical and their role in evolutionary theory. In many ways, the reconstruction of the past and the imaginary realm of the future occupy similar creative or fictional spaces. Wells was clearly interested in prehistory, whether through imaginative encounters with primitive man in 'A Story of the Stone Age', or modern man's encounter with primitive survivals in 'Aepyornis Island'. McNabb makes a good point that the narratives of evolution Wells is interested in are not confined to the biological world, as with Eloi and Morlocks, or the aliens in *The War of the Worlds*, but also to the evolution of scientific technology. Fictions of science are not confined to novels about the future, but also take place in the broader cultural belief in the drive for ever-better technology. Stories like Wells' 'The Lord of the Dynamos' suggest 'the dangers arising from cultural and technological evolution' (297). There are also some nice elements of local colour – such as the Bury St. Edmunds human skull being destroyed by the Post Office looking for terrorist explosives as a possible background to 'The Stolen Bacillus'.

There are some awkward moments in McNabb's occasionally digressive style. An attempt to provide a brief history of science fiction, alongside a somewhat bizarre interpolation of the history of the periodical press (beginning with the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1731), push the book into the territory of the enthusiastic amateur. It is not entirely easy to decide who comprises the intended market for the book: although having the feel of an academic book reaching out to a popular audience – much as the kind of works Wells may well have read, like Clodd's *The Story of Primitive Man* – it will probably appeal more to those with an academic interest in palaeontology. It provides a thorough history of Victorian anthropology for the student of archaeology and sociology; it provides an interesting cultural context for students of Wells, and some useful pointers, but it lacks subtlety of reading in its literary analysis. Wells' scientific articles undoubtedly had some impact in the marketplace for recent sociological theories in the 1890s, but other works must also be seen in this context to balance the impression McNabb gives. For example, Grant Allen is mentioned, and his biography of Darwin and an essay on primitive man referred to, but, although the satire of *The British Barbarians* is described, the information appears to have been derived from Morton's 2005 book on Allen rather than research into the novel itself.

More could also have been done with the material culture of Wells' era, something connected to that ethnographical drive in Wells' books to depict the totality of an imagined culture or society. In the minutiae of Wells's texts we see something of this. For example, I've always been fascinated by the Palace of

Green Porcelain in *The Time Machine* that critics sometimes examine a little confusedly. An article by Robert Crossley in *Science Fiction Essays and Studies* in 1990, on Museums in science fiction, notes how the Palace resembles ‘a composite of the several branches of the British Museum in Bloomsbury and South Kensington as they existed at the close of the nineteenth century’ and the reference to the fossil skeleton of the Brontosaurus in Wells’ novel, ‘is reminiscent of the brontosaurus that dominated the East Dinosaur Gallery of the Natural History Museum’. Only there wasn’t such a beast. In London, the reconstructed monster is actually a Diplodocus and wasn’t erected until 1905, more a case of fiction influencing reality. Nevertheless, Wells’s reference is interesting and demonstrates how precarious may be our grasp of Wells’s sources. Between 1877 and 1892, two American paleontologists, Othniel Charles Marsh and Edward Drinker Cope engaged in what became popularly known as the ‘Bone Wars’, self-funding archaeological digs for dinosaur fossils in the rich geological fields of the Western States of America. In 1879, Marsh discovered a complete skeleton specimen of what he believed to be a new species that he called ‘Brontosaurus’ (or ‘Atlantosaurus’), the largest fossil dinosaur to have been found. Cope dismissed the beast as simply a larger version of a dinosaur type already discovered and rejected the name. Huxley met Marsh in London and became a firm supporter of his work. Wells’s assertion of the existence of the Brontosaurus may well come from Huxley’s favouring of Marsh and place Wells on the Brontosaurus side of the wars. Wells’s brontosaurus came from a femur on display in the Natural History Museum, along with the ‘lower part of a huge skeleton ... after the fashion of the Megatharium’ in the same paragraph. Wells must have known this Museum well, and, significantly for McNabb’s subject, the Museum also held a growing collection of palaeontological specimens. In 1885, when Wells was in his happiest year at South Kensington, *The Times* described a ‘newly arranged series’ in ‘case No. 1’ of the Museum’s ‘mammalian gallery’.

This instructive case contains remains of prehistoric or early man associated with the remains of extinct animals in the caves of Germany, France, and Italy; but of greater interest still are the remains from our British caves, bones of men and women occurring with those animals very long since extinct in Britain and Europe. They are so arranged and named as to command attention from every visitor, and they truthfully convey knowledge of the early history of extinct life in our own island.

The newspaper concludes by noticing ‘the almost exact similarity’ between a Neanderthal skull and a gorilla skull in another gallery. Although the discussion in McNabb’s book draws extensively on fossil finds in most of its chapters, this context is lacking in the work on Wells, which is a pity. Wells is saddled with the responsibility for disseminating a popular view of anthropology through his Darwinian stories, but the obvious interaction between the scientific

world and the public, including Wells in the latter, through the space of the museum would have been appropriate to develop in McNabb's narrative.

Further, the book omits one of the best discussions of Wells and anthropology, Peter Kemp's *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape*, which treads over similar ground but with a more literary eye. Kemp, for his part, omits discussion of August Weismann, whose work was translated in 1888 and forms a significant focus for McNabb, particularly in relation to the debates around agency in evolutionary development. McNabb sees the Weismann, Romanes, Huxley debate echoed in *The Time Machine*. In addition, the chapter elucidates the conflict between Lamarckism and Darwinism: the narrative of progress and self-betterment versus the narrative of chance and possible extinction. In Wells's case, there is a conflicting position in relation to his Socialist thinking – the ultimate pointlessness due to natural evolution of aiming for social betterment. Wells' view that social change could affect the present, although it would not have much impact on the long-term evolution or degeneration of mankind is forcefully made. For McNabb the significance of plasticity in Wells's ideas is central: 'to what extent human physical morphology and human behaviour were fixed and immutable' (298).

On the whole, there is much to recommend this book for anyone interested in the debates around evolution and the origins of man that fascinated Wells in the 1890s. It provides an accessible background context in elaborate detail, and extends the fixing of Wells and his fiction within these debates. As I read, I found myself rethinking aspects of Wells' fictional representation of this scientific world, and that is surely the aim of any good book.