

## Emotional Comfort and Theoretical Necessity: Sex and Gender in the Age of Darwin

BY RICHARD BELLON\*

EVELLEEN RICHARDS. *Darwin and the Making of Sexual Selection*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. xxxiii + 669 pp., illus., index. ISBN 978-0226436906. \$47.50 (hardcover).

MICHAEL RUSE. *Darwinism ad Religion: What Literature Tells Us About Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xvi + 310 pp., index. ISBN 978-0190241025. \$34.95 (hardcover).

HEATHER ELLIS. *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831–1918*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xii + 240 pp., index. ISBN 978-1137311733. \$79.99 (hardcover).

JIM ENDERSBY. *Orchid: A Cultural History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. viii + 292 pp., illus., index. ISBN 978-0226376325. \$30.00 (hardcover).

In August of 2017, a Google software engineer named James Damore posted a ten-page memo to an internal company message board. “Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber,” as it was titled, lamented that “a politically correct monoculture” at the tech giant refused to recognize that “on average, men and women biologically differ in many ways.” Women, in Damore’s telling, typically valued aesthetics over ideas and agreeableness over assertion. They prized sociability and cooperation more than men, and thirsted less for status. The typical feminine personality was simply ill equipped for stressful and often solitary tech jobs, Damore argued, particularly ones that demanded systematic thought or aggressive leadership. Diversity efforts could not eliminate stark

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*Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*, Vol. 48, Number 2, pps. 246–257. ISSN 1939-1811, electronic ISSN 1939-182X. © 2018 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/hsns.2018.48.2.246>.

gender disparities in tech employment because these reflected a natural order borne of biology. Damore complained that those who dissented from Google's left-wing "social engineering" were shamed into silence.<sup>1</sup> Controversy over the memo quickly spread from Google to the wider public. The company soon fired Damore for violating its code of conduct by advancing harmful gender stereotypes.

In the memo, Damore fashioned himself as a hardheaded rationalist speaking scientific truth to woolly-headed and censorious sentimentalists. This is a well-worn stance. In the nineteenth century, the American sociologist William Graham Sumner struck exactly the same tone when he scorned the "headlong" social reformers who condemned the economic inequality of the Gilded Age. The lopsided distribution of wages and wealth, he insisted, flowed from the natural distribution of talent. "It is the greatest folly of which a man can be capable to sit down with a slate and pencil to plan out a new social world," he wrote in 1894.<sup>2</sup> Like Sumner, Damore leaned heavily on evolution. The differences between men and women, he claimed, are "exactly what we would predict from an evolutionary psychology perspective." Supporters echoed this point. Start-up investor and paleo-diet impresario John Durant tweeted that "Charles Darwin himself would be fired from @Google for his views on the sexes."<sup>3</sup>

The invocation of Darwin and evolutionary biology in current disputes over diversity in the workplace show that the gender dimensions of Victorian biology hold more than historical interest. The past year has seen the publication of four important new studies that, by deepening our appreciation of gender and science in the nineteenth century, provide insight into the rhetoric that envelopes today's discussions about what it means to be a man or a woman, masculine or feminine.

The nature and origins of Darwin's thought on sex are captured in unparalleled depth and sophistication in Evelleen Richards destined-to-be classic, *Darwin*

1. Kate Conger, "Exclusive: Here's The Full 10-Page Anti-Diversity Screeed Circulating Internally at Google," 8/05/17 4:30pm, Gizmodo, <https://gizmodo.com/exclusive-heres-the-full-10-page-anti-diversity-screed-1797564320> (accessed 7 Feb 2018).

2. William Graham Sumner, "The Absurd Effort to Make the World Over," in *War and Other Essays*, ed. Albert Galloway Keller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 195–210, on 210.

3. @johndurant, 9 August 2017, 1:29am, twitter.com. The comment was picked up in Nellie Bowles, "Push for Gender Equality in Tech? Some Men Say It's Gone Too Far," *New York Times* (23 Sep 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/23/technology/silicon-valley-men-backlash-gender-scandals.html> (accessed 7 Feb 2018).

*and the Making of Sexual Selection*. At nearly 700 pages, and with 1,506 endnotes, it's physically and intellectually hefty. But Richards's ambitious and deeply researched examination of "the racial, class, and gender dimensions of Darwin's conception of sexual selection" is also highly readable (xxi–xxiii). Anyone who wants to know how or why Darwin constructed sexual selection for a capitalist and secularizing society will find an abundance of fresh insights, big ideas, and vivid details.

The scientific constructions of sex and gender that Richards charts with such precision become, in Michael Ruse's telling, central components of a "secular religious perspective." He reports that *Darwinism as Religion: What Literature Tells Us about Evolution* adds to the collage he has been building since *The Darwinian Revolution* (1979). Darwinism as it existed in the nineteenth century differs considerably, he believes, from the "professional science of Darwin-indebted evolutionary studies." Rather, for decades after the *Origin of Species* (1859), evolution provided a secular creation narrative that (like Christianity) "makes us . . . wonder about ourselves and our beliefs and our actions." Sex is eternally entangled in ruminations on who we are, what we think, how we behave. In Darwinism, the Victorians found a creed that "is as obsessed with sex as is Christianity" (ix–xi, 135, 167–69). Ruse draws heavily on novels and poetry to trace out the contours of this obsession with his characteristic directness, humor, curiosity, and rigor (although too bad about the editing).<sup>4</sup>

The Victorian fixation on sex that dominates the books by Richards and Ruse has a long history. Jim Endersby's sparkingly written and beautifully illustrated *Orchid: A Cultural History* shows how over centuries a single charismatic plant family embodied at different times and places some combination of virility, seduction, guile, splendor, and luxury. The ancient Greeks drolly observed that orchid species, at least those they knew, sported a pair of fat-storing tubers which called to mind *orkhis*—their word for testicles. With sexuality embedded in their very name, it isn't surprising that the Greeks attributed aphrodisiac power to orchids. Millennia later, botanists like John Lindley simultaneously treated orchids as objects of scientific investigation and horticultural craving during the nineteenth century's erotically charged "orchidmania." The plants' complicated sex lives provided the subject of Darwin's *Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilised by Insects* (1862), his first

4. Typos pockmark the book, the index is unreliable, and in a few places Ruse's usual clarity escapes him, particularly in footnotes (see, e.g., note 7 on 56).

book after the *Origin*. This stolid monograph revolutionized the scientific understanding of reproductive mechanisms in flowering plants. Darwin and countless contemporaries would not have been able to study and cultivate orchids without the gendered economy of the plant trade—as one hagiographer of a prominent collector noted, European botany and horticulture owed a profound debt to “those able and energetic men who have roamed the savage world in search of new plants” (5–8, 12–14, 74–75, 82, 107).

Heather Ellis demonstrates that celebrations of scientific manliness routinely carried defensive undertones. In *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831–1918*, she notes that, with a few exceptions, historians of science employ gender as an analytical category only when women feature explicitly in a story. Although we have a rich literature on narratives of female inferiority, Ellis correctly notes that we know relatively little about “how the discourse shapers—the, presumably heterosexual, white, upper-class male scientists—fashioned their own identities through the languages and practices of science.” She demolishes the notion that men of science in the nineteenth century enjoyed an unchallenged masculine persona (1–3, 21). Her textured and sophisticated book deserves to become required reading for anyone interested in science and gender.

These four works cover enough territory to fill a special issue of *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*. Each individually offers insight into the Victorian obsession with the intersection of beauty, God, and moral judgment; together they transform our historical understanding of this topic. They also offer striking perspectives on numerous individuals. For instance, read together, complementary accounts of Thomas Carlyle by Richards, Ruse, and Ellis present a fresh picture of the Victorian sage. (Disappointingly, orchids appear to be one of those rare subjects on which Carlyle did not venture an opinion).

Since I cannot touch on more than a small number of the books' lines of research, I will concentrate on two personal conclusions. First, we cannot disentangle the ideology of male superiority from Darwin's revolution. Second, Victorian men of science built their masculine identities in large part around personal relationships with women.

In 1838, a 27-year-old Darwin famously jotted down notes on the pros and the cons of marriage. On one side of the ledger he worried about the expense of a family and sacrificing time for manly conversation and scientific research to the dreary social obligations that marriage carried in its wake. But the prospect

of a lifelong companion, children, and the soft pleasures of music and feminine chitchat more than balanced the loss of time, money, and freedom. He cheerfully decided to exchange the “dingy reality” of bachelor life for a “nice soft wife on a sofa with a good fire.” The humorous tone belies the seriousness with which Darwin approached the prospect of the marriage. He was deciding what type of man he wanted to become. At the heart of Darwin’s self-reflection, Richards convincingly argues, was a “self-regarding view of the subservience of women to men” (35–36).

Richards explains that Darwin always grounded questions about marriage in our biology as sexually reproducing animals.

It was not only outside Darwin’s experience, but beyond his comprehension that a home might be happy in which the woman of the house worked outside it and did not devote herself entirely to husband and children. For Darwin, the moral and intellectual differences between the sexes were as self-evident as the difference in plumage between the peahen and the peacock, and both sets of phenomena were reducible to the same natural causes. . . . There was, after all, no inconsistency between Darwin’s personal experience and his theoretical argument. The women he had known most intimately conformed entirely to Victorian conventions of femininity and domesticity (61).

Darwin’s blind spots were not limited to human sexual differences. Even his most rigorous studies were often influenced by what Richards characterizes as his “conventional objectification of passive female sexuality” (217). His work on pollination mechanisms provides a case in point. Darwin, for example, never explained how certain species of orchids succeeded in coaxing pollinators without offering nectar. The solution only emerged in the early twentieth century. These odd orchids might have been misers with nectar, but they enticed male insects with something even more alluring: sex. The flowers used shape and pheromones to mimic female insects. The hapless (but pollen-covered) males “mated” with flower after flower. Endersby suggests that Darwin failed to recognize this “pseudocopulation” because “he was unable to imagine women being either as intelligent or as sexual as men.” Given orthodox assumptions about female sexual passivity, “it’s not surprising that neither he nor his contemporaries realized just how wily and seductive the orchids were” (202–09).

The influence of prevailing gender ideologies was much less subtle when Darwin turned his attention to humans. Ruse reflects that “the whole point of

his theorizing” on sexual and racial differences in the *Descent of Man* “was to take information that was known already and to put it in a new context, giving it a new meaning.” When it comes to sexual mores and sexual differences among humans, the “new meaning” differed little from the old. “Darwin (and [Thomas] Huxley) had some pretty Victorian ideas about the sexes,” Ruses remarks drily (50, 175). Darwin loathed human contraception, for example. He feared that severing sex and pregnancy would coax respectable women into premarital sex. Once that happened, the family would collapse and pull civilization down with it. As Richards shows, when it came to birth control, Darwin’s evolutionarily grounded fears about social order placed him shoulder-to-shoulder with conventional Christian moralists (52, 494–95).

None of this should be surprising. For all of his scientific radicalism, when it came to codes of moral duty, Richards is right: Darwin was “a thoroughly conventional, deeply uxorious man” (41). As he explained to his wife early in their marriage, while he might doubt the tenets of Christianity, “luckily there were no doubts as to how one ought to act.”<sup>5</sup>

The codes of conduct that governed the households of Darwin and his friends give us broader insight into the construction of masculinity and femininity in British science. Richards claims that Darwin’s tenderness and love for his family meant that he was “not . . . in any sense a typical Victorian patriarch” (47). It’s a different question whether or not the *genuineness* of his domestic affections and gentleness was common, but it seems clear to me that Darwin was the *ideal* Victorian patriarch. Richards quotes John Tosh’s observation in *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999) that the Victorian self-image of the family relied on “domesticated husbands.” Richards records that Darwin received ample compensation for the love and attention he lavished on his wife Emma and their children. Life in Down House revolved around his comfort and scientific interests. “His love and gratitude endorsed the narrow, entirely domestic lives he tenderly imposed on his wife and daughters,” Richards astutely perceives (56–57). Darwin’s devotion and respect for his wife and children did not mitigate his patriarchal authority; it cemented it.

John Stuart Mill noted in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) that “all men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected

5. Emma Darwin to Charles Darwin (ca. Feb 1839), *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, ed. F. Burkhardt and others, vol. 2 of 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–), 172.

with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite.”<sup>6</sup> Mill insisted that women are relentlessly socialized from birth to serve others. A wife attended her husband in exchange for kindhearted protection. Tosh points out that the ideal Victorian marriage was grounded on intimacy, comfort, trust, and strategic indulgence; on this point, if few others, the egalitarian Mill agreed with his antifeminist opponents.<sup>7</sup> In the *Descent of Man* (1871) Darwin predictably rejected Mill’s contention that perceived intellectual and moral differences between men and women were grounded in social and cultural conditioning (Richards, 441–49).

Mill’s term “subjection” best captures the place of women in Victorian science. Subjection, as Mill readily makes clear, frequently entailed excluding women from opportunities and privileges. But, overall, subjection does not banish but subordinates. I think that Ellis places too hard an emphasis on “a formal exclusion of women from science” (91–92, see also 19–24). She implicitly treats the domestic and moral support of women to science as incidental. Victorian men of science could not have participated effectively in even the most exclusively masculine spheres of activity without the backing of women. Charles Darwin’s science relied on Emma, his daughter Henrietta, and assorted nieces. Emma helped manage her husband’s letters, notes, and manuscripts. (The fact that it has taken the Darwin Correspondence Project more than thirty years and twenty-five volumes to reach 1877 shows that administering Darwin’s post was anything but trivial.) Emma and later Henrietta were invaluable copyeditors. Boys and girls in the extended Darwin clan routinely collected data—although only Darwin’s sons received public recognition (47–59).

The subjection of women appears in starker relief in the life of Darwin’s closest friend, the botanist Joseph Hooker. His father William married his mother Maria, the talented and scientifically trained eldest daughter of his early scientific patron, Dawson Turner. The two formed a productive lifelong partnership. Richards reports that Emma had little interest in science, just in her scientist (47); the same was not true of Maria. Her son reported matter-of-factly to Darwin that she read the just-published *Origin* “with much pleasure.”<sup>8</sup> Ellis argues compellingly that men of science anxiously fought to be

6. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), 26–27.

7. John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 53–54.

8. Joseph Hooker, “A Sketch of the Life and Labours of Sir William Jackson Hooker,” *Annals of Botany* 16 (1902): ix–xc, on xxxiii, xli. Leonard Huxley, ed., *Life and Letters of Sir Joseph Dalton*

seen as “gentleman.” The Swiss botanist Alphonse de Candolle reflected that Maria’s grace was central to the hospitality that made her husband a “true English gentleman.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1847, at a meeting of the British Association, Joseph Hooker became engaged to Frances Henslow, the daughter of Cambridge’s professor of botany and Darwin’s beloved mentor. In a letter to his “affectionate grandfather (& man of business),” Joseph explained the reasons behind his attachment.

These are very much her being entirely suited to me in point of station & connection; her being very industrious, with plenty of energy; good education & principles & an initiation into the pursuits of a scientific man. She is much cleverer than I am & will I hope correct the press well, has no palpable vice or expensive habits.

He declared, but only in passing, that he was also “smitten.” The letter concluded with his plans to leave England for at least two years to botanize in a tropical country. “Miss H. knows of my intentions & is quite content to wait like a good girl,” he reported complacently.<sup>10</sup> The couple married in 1851 after he returned from a dangerous expedition centered on the Himalayas. From the start, she provided exhaustive behind-the-scenes assistance to his work as a researcher and scientific administrator.<sup>11</sup> A few years later the couple shared a mountaineering adventure in the Swiss Alps. Frances’s physical stamina gobsmacked Darwin (Richards 333).

Leonard Huxley, as editor of Hooker’s *Life and Letters*, celebrated the long engagement as proof of Frances’s readiness to share in Joseph’s aims and “appreciate the worth of their joint sacrifice.”<sup>12</sup> This emphasis on a “joint sacrifice” defined exclusively by the man points to a deeper role of wives, daughters, sisters, and other female relatives in the formation of scientific identity. The willingness of women like Frances Henslow Hooker to lend moral and not just practical support created a spiritual infrastructure for scientific activities. Men of science defined their masculine intellectual character in large part through association with women. Rival groups in turn tried to

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*Hooker*, vol. 1 of 2 (London: John Murray, 1918), 15–16. Joseph Hooker to Darwin, [12 Dec 1859], *Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, vol. 7 (ref. 5), 426.

9. Alphonse de Candolle, “La vie et les écrits de Sir William Hooker,” *Archives des sciences physiques et naturelles* 28 (1866): 44–62, on 47.

10. Joseph Hooker to Dawson Turner, 7 Jul 1847. *Letters from J.D. Hooker*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Archives.

11. Huxley, ed., *Life and Letters*, vol. 2 (ref. 8), 190.

12. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 350.

undermine science's claims to cultural authority by attacking this particular construction of masculinity.

Ellis observes that during the “decline of science” debate in the 1830s, Charles Babbage and David Brewster contrasted the values of natural philosophy to those prevailing in either the military barracks or the cloister—two sites of masculine activity that women could only enter illicitly (38–41). Men of science particularly feared association with the image of the cloistered and isolated scholar. She draws effectively on Steven Shapin’s observation that natural philosophers in the seventeenth century fought to slough off a reputation for pedantic, morose, and solitary scholarship by associating themselves, their research, and their social habits with gentlemanly vigor. The connection of science with effete pedantry, Ellis argues convincingly, remained potent deep into the nineteenth century (49–50, 63, 88, 95). What she does not sufficiently address, in my view, are the ways that properly regulated associations with women enabled men of science to counter accusations of pedantry or foppishness.

Marriage provided the most obvious route to the benefits of feminine society. A close friend successfully prodded John Herschel to court a wife to arrest his slide into glum and secluded eccentricity.<sup>13</sup> A decade later, Darwin shuddered at the prospect “of spending ones [*sic*] whole life, like a neuter bee, working, working, & nothing after all.”<sup>14</sup> Marriage, by itself, would not automatically bring respite from an imbalanced or morally isolated life. Ruse’s analysis of George Eliot’s “very Darwinian” *Middlemarch* notes that matrimony liberated neither the sallow Edward Casaubon nor the ambitious Tertius Lydgate. Casaubon spurned the revitalizing spiritual influence of his young wife; he rebuffed a worthy partner. Lydgate succumbed to erotic appeal unleavened by moral seriousness; he chose poorly. On the other hand, Fred Vincy and Will Ladislaw acquired moral redemption from their romantic unions (72–75).

Marriage was not an absolute requirement for scientific masculinity. Adam Sedgwick’s status as a lifelong bachelor did not prevent him from embodying manly heroism. Significantly, however, he cultivated a wide circle of female friends, admirers, and correspondents. Ellis describes well his flattering and flirting with women at British Association meetings. “Dark eyes and fair faces,”

13. Günther Buttman, *The Shadow of the Telescope: A Biography of John Herschel*, transl. B.E.J. Pagel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 67–69.

14. “Notes on Marriage,” *Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, vol. 2, App. IV (ref. 5), 444.

he believed, enhanced a gentlemanly atmosphere. He and William Whewell lobbied to admit wives and daughters to British Association proceedings (73–75). As unmarried Cambridge dons, they were particularly exposed to accusations of monastic isolation.<sup>15</sup>

Sedgwick did not consider women merely decorative. Science depended upon social practices that could not exist absent the “cementing principle” of feminine moral judgment. In his notorious review of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, he expressed his “highest trust” in women’s sentiments. Women’s judgment underwrote “all the moral duties of common life”—and science existed within the web of such duties. In the next breath he dismissed female corporeal and intellectual power. “The ascent up the hill of science is rugged and thorny, and ill-fitted for the drapery of a petticoat,” he declared. His celebration of women’s moral superiority justified their subjection because it underwrote men’s claim to greater physical and intellectual vigor. Women must never assume a role properly assigned by God and nature to men, or vice versa. He claimed that he initially suspected a feminine hand behind *Vestiges* before concluding that the case was actually worse. The anonymous author was a man acting like a woman acting like a man. This effete behavior not only produced dreadful science. It inverted “our modest principles and social manners.”<sup>16</sup>

I disagree with Ellis’s claim that the admiration Sedgwick, Whewell, and others wanted to elicit from women at the British Association was “passive.” Ellis quotes a journalist who reported from the 1836 meeting that the “soft portion” of the audience studied the scientific lions “to see what kind of creature a philosopher was” (74–75). Such scrutiny, I believe, was anything but passive. Three years earlier, in his closing address to the Cambridge meeting, Sedgwick warned the assembly about the dangers of “the waywardness of man’s will and the turbulence of man’s passions.” Meetings must steer away from tempestuous religious and political questions, he insisted. At the same time, they must never lose sight of their higher moral obligation to exult the intelligent First Cause.<sup>17</sup> Sedgwick does not here address gender roles, but it seems reasonably clear that performing for female approval could direct men’s eyes toward heaven and keep their hands off each other’s throats.

15. Whewell would later marry.

16. Adam Sedgwick, “Natural History of Creation,” *Edinburgh Review* 82 (1845): 1–85, on 3–4.

17. Adam Sedgwick, [Closing Address], *Report of the Third Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science; Held at Cambridge in 1833* (London: John Murray 1834): xxviii–xxxii, on xxix–xxx.

The Darwin family illustrates this dynamic. Richards shows that, for Darwin, middle-class men had no higher duty than to “choose good wives” (35). Tosh observes in *A Man’s Place* that, for the Victorians, “the good wife deployed her purity as a means of cooling her husband’s ardour, and so protect him from the dangers of over-indulgence.”<sup>18</sup> Here Tosh refers specifically to sexual desire, but women tempered men’s natural passions and pugnacity more generally. As her father’s copyeditor, Henrietta Darwin penciled out passages of dubious moral respectability with the same zeal as she untangled syntax. The draft of Darwin’s biographical sketch of his grandfather Erasmus Darwin acknowledged religious unorthodoxy and pleasure in women’s erotic allure. Henrietta meticulously relegated mistresses, illegitimate children, and impiety to footnotes, when she did not scratch out a dubious passage entirely. Darwin deferred to her judgment (Richards 41).

Most notably, Darwin honed his strategy for dealing with vexing religious controversies at his own hearth by delicately managing his religious differences with Emma (Richards 48). This careful domestic balancing influenced Darwin’s public character. Endersby points out that Darwin scrupulously avoided religious controversies whenever possible (92). This earned him a valuable reputation for modesty and conciliation. The Rev. George Prothero preached at Darwin’s funeral that “surely in such a man lived that charity which is the very essence of the true spirit of Christ.” Prothero was not merely eulogizing “the greatest man of science of his day.”<sup>19</sup> He paid tribute to the husband of Emma Darwin.

Richards, Ellis, Ruse, and Endersby in their different ways show that there never has been nor can there ever be “scientific” understandings of sex and gender that are innocent of cultural and political preoccupations or free from long and tangled intellectual inheritances.

The dense and specialized scientific descriptions in Darwin’s *Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilised by Insects* differ dramatically from the lush and often racy poetry of his grandfather’s *The Love of Plants*. Both, however, share a fascination with sex and fertility as manifestations of natural law rather than direct divine gift (Richards 64–65; Endersby 56–57, 97; Ruse 10–11). For this reason, as Endersby shows, Charles’s botany was enmeshed in the type of culturally charged debates over sexuality, religion, and beauty that

18. Tosh, *Man’s Place* (ref. 7), 46.

19. “The Late Mr. Darwin,” *Illustrated London News* 80 (1882), 418.

Erasmus courted with his poetry. For Ruse, when Thomas Hardy captures Tess Durbeyfield's sexual desire as "the dampness of the garden" receptive to "floating pollen," or Thomas Huxley reflects on the fate of the garden when abandoned to the cosmic process, they translated the dry technicalities of Darwin's botany into lurid claims about men and women's place in nature. Darwinism, like Christianity, is not infinitely malleable, but it could and did serve a wide array of agendas. If the likes of Sumner invoked the evolutionary process in glib defense of existing inequalities, Ruse remarks that others like Henry Sidgwick and G. E. Moore pushed in the opposite direction (135–36, 150–51, 173–74).

Today, as claims about men and women's biological natures ricochet, we are well served to remember Richards's observation about Darwin's age: "The concept of the innate mental differences between the sexes was as psychologically indispensable as it was theoretically consistent. Emotional comfort might be distilled from theoretical necessity" (60).