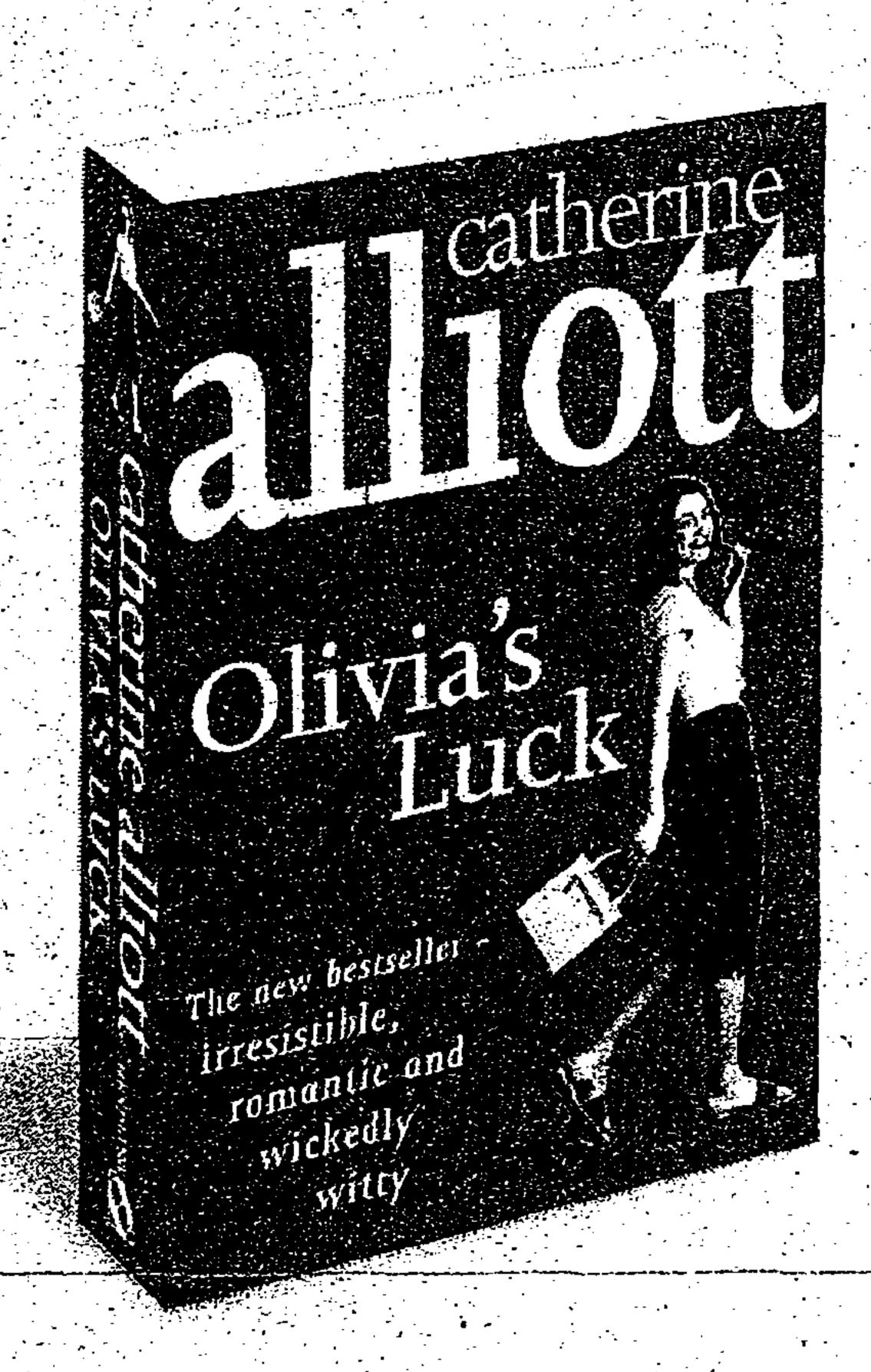
ODSCUTTY

Charles Darwin's long shadow: Roy Porter looks at two scientists eclipsed by his fame, while Steven Rose (right) reflects on his private tragedy

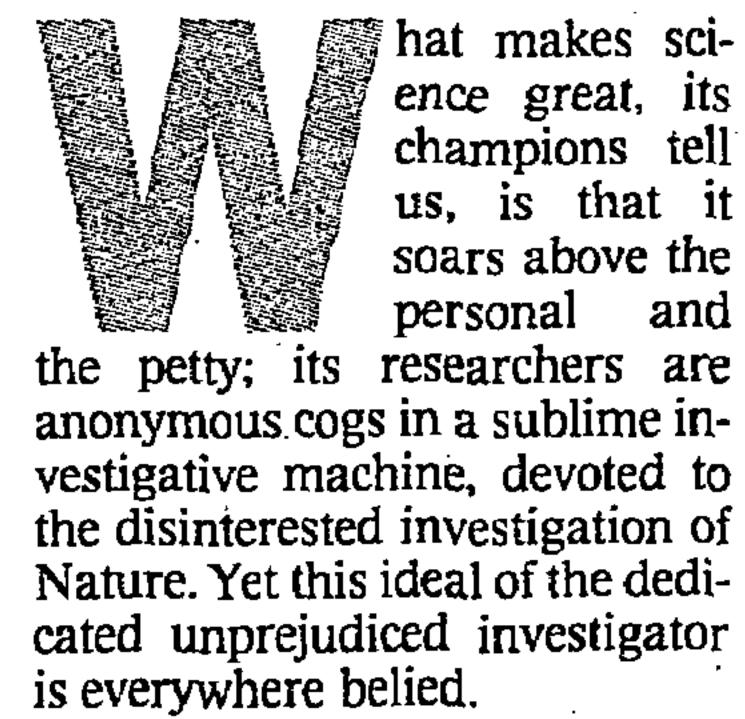
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· For science has its own cults of personality, and the very names of its giants are immortalised think of Pasteurisation. Idealised notions of the altruistic scientist have been debunked by a spate of macho autobiographies, starting with James Watson's Double Helix. Science has no time for losers, its "winner takes all" ethos being enshrined in the Nobel Prize.

But science's glorification of success is only half the paradox. For even "winners" — those who make the breakthroughs — often don't receive the palm. Take Rosalind Franklin's work on DNA, or Giovanni Grassi, now forgotten outside Italy, who cracked the malaria problem before Ronald Ross carried off the prize.

The prime case of a "winner" whom posterity has turned into a "loser", or at least an also-ran, is surely the Victorian naturalist Al-Russel Wallace. Charles Darwin was stunned when he received a letter from the obscure Wallace in 1858, outlining the self-same theory of evolution by natural selection upon which he himself had been quietly working all those years. As is well known, the outcome was a joint public statement of their workin-progress — by any standards, an honorable solution which did genuine credit all round.

But thereafter, from the publication of the Origin of Species (1859) up to the present day, it has been a very different tale. Darwin won all the limelight — ironically so, given his morbidly reclusive tendencies. He even got to be buried in Westminster Abbey, no small achievement for a Victorian atheist. And today's science wars are waged over Neo-Darwinism, social Darwinism and the like — who ever heard of Wallacism? How typical that Darwin has a whole Cambridge college named after him, and Wallace but a room at the University of Bournemouth.

Yet, as Peter Raby shows in his sympathetic yet judicious biography, Wallace was in no way Darwin's inferior, either as a naturalist or thinker. As a young man, the author of the Origin had circumnavigated the world in the Beagle, but Wallace had botan-

Amazonia and later in the East Indies. The same big issues had driven their independent inquiries: Why did species, geographically contiguous, found for instance in archipelagos, display minute but systematic variations? Just the same theoretical tools led both to the solution of evolution, above all Malthus's theory of lethal population pressure (too many creatures, too little food).

This eclipse of Wallace was all a matter of class and prestige. A leisured amateur, Darwin was snugly ensconced within the elite. His doctrines might be dangerous, but gentlemen did not have to be respectable in all they said, and Darwin always managed his career with utter aplomb — he left the dirty work to Huxley. The autodidact Wallace was not so fortunate. If never actually starying, he was always financially insecure and was forced to squander his energies doing donkey work (like marking exam papers) or applying futilely for posts from which his modest back-

ground excluded him. Wallace was, furthermore, too passionate an enthusiast for his own good. His conversion to the idea that human evolution was somehow Providentially guided riled his erstwhile ally Darwin, while his brotherly-love Socialism and rather gullible spiritualist bent embarrassed the lofty guardians of science.

But though Wallace thus became a bit of a scientific liability. ironically he turned into a national institution, celebrated as the perfect instance of that figure so ised and collected for years in beloved of the Victorians, the in 1891 he found—a femur, teeth, equivocal.

ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE

By Peter Raby

Chatto & Windus, £20; 352 pp ISBN 0 701 168382 £18 (free p&p) 0870 160 80 80

THE MAN WHO FOUND THE MISSING LINK The Extraordinary Life of Eugène Dubois

By Pat Shipman

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £25 ISBN 0 297 84290 0, 580 pp £23 (free p&p) 0870 160 80 80

Smilesian self-made man. He endeared himself by fighting to save Epping Forest, and by commemorating the "wonderful century" they had lived through. If scientific honours came slowly and grudgingly, Wallace it was who was awarded a state pension and finally the Order of Merit.

The East Indies which proved the stage for Wallace's great discovery were also the making of Eugène Dubois, another forgotten evolutionist now definitively resurrected by Pat Shipman. An early Darwinist — that word again! — the Dutch anatomist grasped that the weakest link in the chain of evidence for evolution was the absence of fossil remains of the ancestors of homo sapiens. Reasoning that because Java contained orang-utans and gibbons it might also be the site of such ape-man remains, off he went. He surveyed, he dug, and

and a cranium. Dubois' Pithecanthropus was intermediate between a great ape and a human, with apelike molars, but humanoid thigh bones and a large brain. No mean achievement for

a man in his thirties. The rest of his long career, however, was anticlimax, enigma — and even tragedy. The cutand-thrust of scientific competition turned him rigid, cantankerous and authoritarian. Increasingly on the defensive, in the end he was practically reduced to denying the importance of his "Java man", rather than sharing its glory with others. As Pat Shipman shows in chilling detail, in Dubois' case the social institutions of science served not to promote inquiry but to shore up a flawed personality.

Yet while Shipman is a seasoned writer her book makes heavy going because of the flyon-the-wall form of the historical novel she has adopted. Was his wife carrying on with his best

"He lost his temper in a flash. He strode over to them, keeping his voice down with effort, his face distorted with fury. 'Can't you ever stay apart from each other for a few moments while I leave the room,' he hissed. 'Am I to have this going on under my very nose?" And on it goes in this Mills and Boon vein, for page after cringe-making page.

Science is a cruel taskmaster. Those who end up on the losing side are made the fools of time. But, as these two books show, the rewards of success may be at best

