



Darwin: A Life in Poems

Ruth Padel

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This remarkable book brings us an intimate and moving interpretation of the life and work of Charles Darwin, by Ruth Padel, an acclaimed British poet and a direct descendant of the famous scientist.

Charles Darwin, born in 1809, lost his mother at the age of eight, repressed all memory of her, and poured his passion into solitary walks, newt collecting, and shooting. His five-year voyage on H.M.S. *Beagle*, when he was in his twenties, changed his life. Afterward, he began publishing his findings and working privately on groundbreaking theories about the development of animal species, including human beings, and he made a nervous proposal to his cousin Emma.

Padel's poems sparkle with nuance and feeling as she shows us the marriage that ensued, and the rich, creative atmosphere the Darwins provided for their ten children. Charles and Emma were happy in each other, but both were painfully aware of the gulf between her deep Christian faith and his increasing religious doubt. The death of three of their children accentuated this gulf. For Darwin, death and extinction were nature's way of developing new species: the survival of the fittest; for Emma, death was a prelude to the afterlife.

These marvelous poems—enriched by helpful marginal notes and by Padel's ability to move among multiple viewpoints, always keeping Darwin at the center—bring to life the great scientist as well as the private man and tender father. This is a biography in rare form, with an unquantifiable depth of family intimacy and warmth.

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