



## Charles Darwin - the man and the scientist

### *Darwin's marriage*

Graphic: Faith and Reason:  
A portrait of Charles and Emma

Graphic: She didn't think he cared

### **Ruth Padel:**

When Darwin returned from the Beagle in England, after a couple of years he made a very nervous proposal to his first cousin Emma Wedgwood. She was rather surprised and very pleased.

She didn't think he cared

'I was glad he was not too sure of being accepted. I went immediately to the village school but found after an hour I'd taught the children nothing, was turning into an idiot and so came away. He is the most transparent man I ever saw and most affectionate. Every word expresses his real thought. But he is so fond of us all at Maer, so demonstrative in his manner, I did not think it meant anything. The week I spent in London, earlier, I felt sure he did not care about me. He was very unwell. That was all.'

Graphic: He ignores his father's advice

### **Ruth Padel:**

After Emma accepted him, he told her he had doubts about Christian revelation. This was the source of the great gulf in their marriage which both of them tackled with honesty and pain and integrity all their lives.

His father Robert Darwin was a doctor, had advised him when he did marry to conceal any religious doubts he had from his wife. He thought it made for disunion in a marriage.

Charles ignores his father's advice

Her face pale as vaulting in the Cordillera church where he read Milton one morning alone. What in me is dark, illumine. He's trying to heft his doubt about Christian Revelation. The leaves of his life are gossiping around him. He accepts Christian morality, of course! He stares at a quiff of feather on her skirt.

He'd like, he really would, to believe in afterlife and the promise of Salvation. A sudden flush like coral cloud in eastern sky, a photochemical exchange on the face he's known since he was small, marks passage of the prayer that must be moving in her mind like dolphins underwater. God grant he change.

He's sure, now, morality has organic origin.  
'Luckily there's no doubt how we ought to act.'  
He stares at a caryatid holding up the mantelpiece.

He's known this, too, all his life. 'As for salvation:  
other people find the arguments convincing.'  
Their eyes meet – there's that, at least. 'I can't.'

Fade to black and up again

**Ruth Padel:**

One of the things that happened to me this year while I was writing the poems was I really sort of fell in love with Darwin and his wife and their relationship. He was an enormously conscientious man, very, very affectionate, and the centre of all this affection was his relationship with Emma. They were immensely honest to each other always, they laughed a lot. There were always moments of sort of scratchiness when each one of them would turn it with a laugh and that's recorded by their, the memoirs of several of their children, by Francis and Henrietta in particular.

Graphic: The Open Window

**Ruth Padel:**

In the Origin of Species Darwin he does not mention man at all; the origin of man; he was only anxious to describe the principle of evolution and so that meant that he did not actually publicly disavow the existence of God and this was very lucky for the relationship he had with his wife Emma.

The Open Window

There is no greater mystery in the whole world, as it seems to me, than the existence of sexes he wrote in a letter to his friend Henslow in 1860.

He's glad that she is glad. He has not publicly  
rejected a Creator and he hardly mentioned Man.  
'Psychology will now be based on a new foundation:  
the acquirement of each necessary power. Capacity  
by graduation.' That was all. The soon-to-be  
Archbishop of Canterbury explains you can, indeed,  
square evolution with a God. 'God operates  
through the slow work of natural cause.'

He gets a fan letter from Charles Kingsley, novelist.  
'Even better than making the world, God makes  
the world make itself.' He watches her smile  
at Lenny and open a window for fresh air.  
Religion: the burned heart in its thorns. A rock face  
shot with quartz on which the sun  
shines as it rises, lighting the rock to fire.

Graphic: He Leaves a Message on the Edge

People often died in childbirth at that time. She wrote him a note because she was so scared that if she died in childbirth she wouldn't see him again. We don't know what happened between them but what we do know is that he wrote a little message on the edge of her letter, folded it up and left it to be found after his death forty, fifty years later.

He Leaves a Message on the Edge

He kept her note all his life. He must have said  
something then, but he wrote to her too  
on the outer fold. (No one knows when.  
He was maybe quite old. He wasn't blind  
to where his thought led, what she thought  
she'd lose.) 'When I am dead, know I have kissed and cried over this many times.'