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Many books mark bicentennial of Darwin's birth

Susan Faust, Special to The Chronicle

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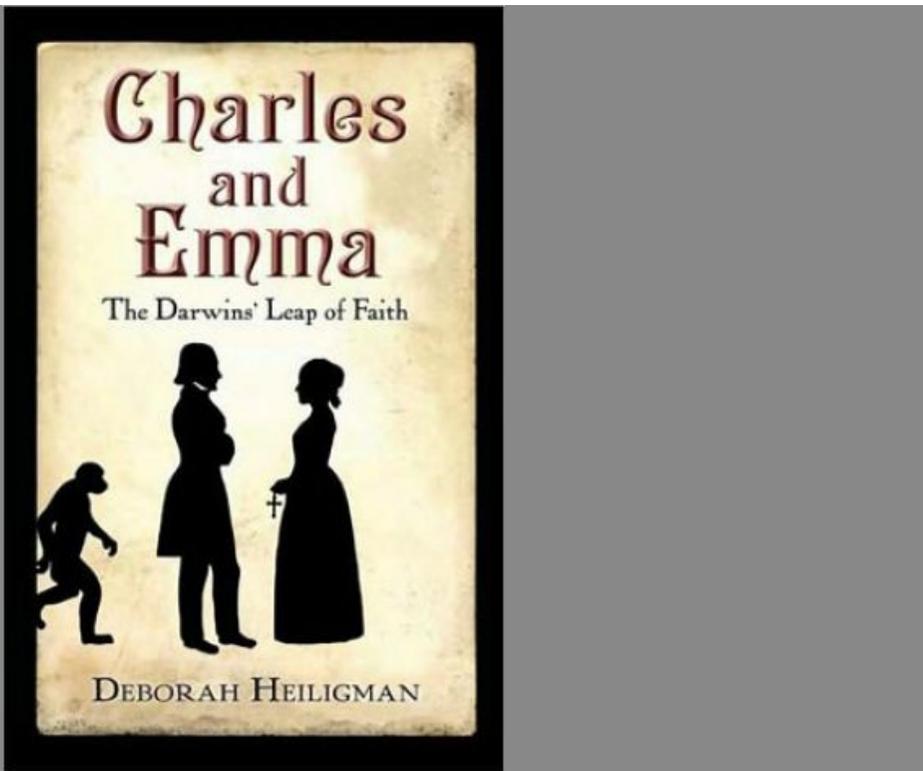
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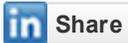
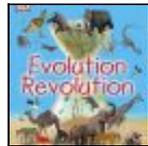
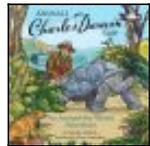
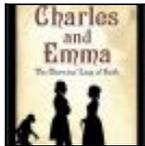
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It's a big year for Charles Darwin, whose 200th birthday was Feb. 12 and whose book "On the Origin of the Species" turns 150 in November. There are many new books to commemorate his life and work and, of course, the ensuing and enduring controversies around his theories. Some books give important introductions to his famed voyage on the Beagle, undertaken between 1831 and 1835. But

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only one is equal to the task of capturing the fullness of what follows - marriage, fatherhood, discovery and revolution, unfolding in Victorian England.

Operating on many levels and with unusual grace is **Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith**, by [Deborah Heiligman](#) (Holt; 272 pages; \$18.95; ages 12-up). This lively and lovingly detailed biography focuses on Darwin and his first cousin, [Emma Wedgwood](#). It reconstructs the tender tale of their long marriage for its own intrinsic value and as microcosm of larger concerns.

Many pointed quotations add intimacy and help show how Charles and Emma raised a large family, endured tragic losses and forged a loving relationship. He attends to her sensibilities, and she supports his work, even though she dislikes some of it. The public tension between science and religion is then introduced within the private confines of matrimony - a scientist and a skeptic married to a believer with deep convictions.

Beyond her anatomy of a marriage, Heiligman writes a nuanced intellectual history. There are many stirring moments as Darwin gleans evidence everywhere on natural selection, survival of the fittest and evolution - finch beaks from the Galapagos, an orangutan at the London zoo, local animal and plant breeders, and his own children. And there are many inspiring moments as Darwin reluctantly presents his findings, bravely confronts criticism and refines his thinking.

This is the "wow" biography on the Darwins - meticulously researched, richly rendered and rewarding every step of the way.

A few more Darwin titles:

Animals Charles Darwin Saw: An Around-the-World Adventure, by [Sandra Markle](#); illustrated by [Zina Saunders](#) (Chronicle; 46 pages; \$16.99; ages 7-10). Part of a series, this charming monograph also focuses on the fauna encountered on a landmark expedition.



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Evolution Revolution: From Darwin to DNA, By [Robert Winston](#) (DK; 96 pages; \$16.99; ages 7-10). DK's trademark glossy look serves a scientist and his science well with great visuals, serious discussion, touches of humor and clearly presented concepts to connect the dots.

What Darwin Saw: The Journey That Changed the World, by [Rosalyn Schanzer](#) (National Geographic; 48 pages; \$17.95; ages 10-14). Busy pages brim with many abridged quotes and lively illustrations to follow Darwin's adventures on his grand global tour. There's also room at the end to consider his lightning-rod theories.

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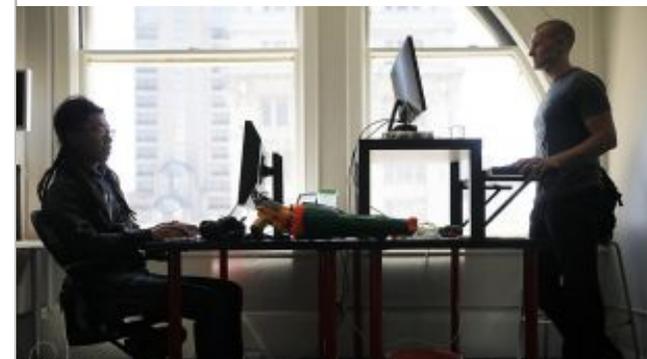


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