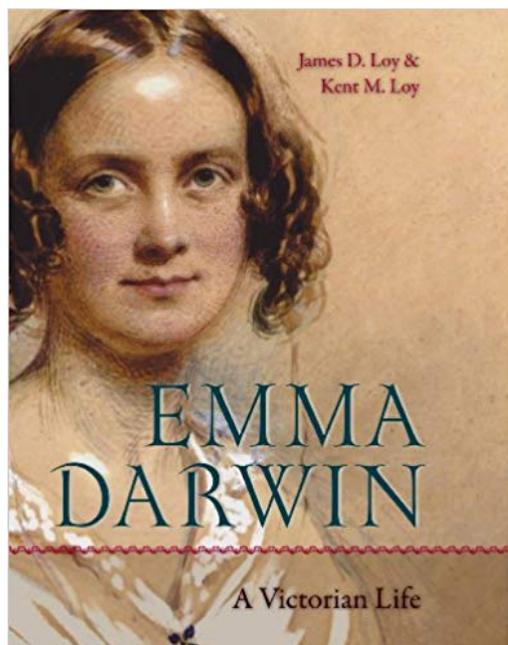


Emma Darwin: A Victorian Life by James D. Loy, Kent M. Loy



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A glimpse into the private home life of the Darwins

"A sensitive, intelligent portrait of Emma Darwin and her life at the centre of Victorian science."--
Emma Darwin, author of *A Secret Alchemy*

"Succeeds brilliantly in discovering the poignant story of Emma Darwin and describing the extraordinary household over which she presided."--Keith Thompson, author of *The Young Charles Darwin*

"Emma Darwin emerges in this well-researched and thoughtful biography as a figure of calm strength, whose very nature and story help make possible Charles Darwin's revolutionary work. The Darwin marriage emerges as a remarkable portrait of 'symmetrical and unconditional love.'"--Kay Young, University of California, Santa Barbara

In 1808, Josiah Wedgwood II, owner and general manager of the famous pottery and china manufactory that bore his name, welcomed an eighth child into his large, vibrant family. This daughter, Emma, had a relatively happy childhood and grew up intelligent, educated, and religious. A talented sportswoman and an accomplished pianist, she married her cousin Charles Darwin at the age of thirty, bore ten children in their forty-three years together, and patiently nursed her famous husband through mysterious and chronic illnesses.

Informed by her strong Christian faith as well as her quick, inquiring mind, Emma learned to coexist with her husband's radical scientific theories, though she worried about the fate of Charles's soul. Although the high spirits of her youth were somewhat dampened by the cares of life, she managed family and household affairs--including the difficult circumstances surrounding the death of three children--with courage, gravity, and a sense of humor.

In this charming volume, the wife, companion, and confidante of the father of evolution comes into full focus. Drawing upon Emma's personal correspondence as well as the abundant literature about her husband, authors James Loy and Kent Loy reveal the fascinating story of an exceptional woman who remained true to herself despite hardship and who, in the process, humanized her work-obsessed husband and held her family together.



Reviews of the **Emma Darwin: A Victorian Life** by James D. Loy, Kent M. Loy

OwerSpeed

I think this book should appeal to two particular groups, in addition to those who savor fine biographical studies. I find the Victorians to be a fascinating group and have reviewed a number of studies on Amazon. Emma Darwin (1808-1896) was the model of the upper-class Victorian wife and mother. Through her experience, we gain insights into the Victorian views of death; why large families were necessary due to the high level of infant and childhood mortality; the Victorian penchant for water cures (including just jumping into the ocean for a swim); and the very constrained roles (including widowhood) open to Victorian women. Emma was quite a religious woman, which caused some difficulties due to Charles' evolutionary theories, and so we learn about the Anglican practices of the era. While not a socialist or "reformer" to be sure, Emma had strong views on slavery and other issues of the day. But the contrast between the Victorian wife and women of today is nothing short of striking, and not alone for the inability to vote. So the book creates a vivid and personalized view of Victorian life during Emma's long life covering most of the Victorian period.

But of course most readers will be interested in learning more about Charles Darwin (1809-1882). While Emma is the central focus of the book, there is a significant amount of information about Charles as well. For one thing, Charles wrote most of his books and papers, and conducted his evolutionary research, at their home, Down House in Kent. So Emma was there to witness Charles at work and to recount her observations extensively in letters to friends. In fact, her daughter Henrietta published many of her family letters, which serve as a primary source for the book, along with Emma's Victorian diaries.

So, there are significant insights into Charles. I had not appreciated previously how ill and how

frequently he was while doing all this research and writing. Nor had I realized how well Charles was known to the British scientific community even before writing the "Origin" in 1859. Emma witnessed Charles interaction with key supporters such as Asa Gray, Thomas Huxley ("Darwin's bulldog"), Charles Lyell and others, while sharing with him the strong public reactions to his evolutionary theories. The authors tell us a bit about each of Darwin's many books in chronological order and how Emma served as an editor and critic for her husband even though she still feared his theories would result in their separation at death.

The book covers the remainder of Emma's life after Charles' death. She was successful in eliminating some material from her son Frank's three-volume edition of the "Life and Letters of Charles Darwin." At pages 307-309, the authors have restored the expurgated paragraphs and this is another contribution of the book. The widowhood years cannot be as interesting as when Charles was around, but her activities and those of her children rounded out a very full life for her.

The book runs some 436 pages, including endnotes, bibliography and index. Some very interesting illustrations are included, the Darwins being among the first to employ photography. The authors have done a solid job of research and their source information is of great value standing alone. As is to be expected, there is much discussion of children and their activities, but I found this often added to the narrative. The only problem I found, and it is one acknowledged by the authors, is that it can be very hard to follow all the key members of the Darwin, Wedgwood and Allen families. The authors have included two pages of genealogies, but while these help some there are still a lot of folks to keep straight. I think a more useful source on this is Randal Keynes, "Darwin, His Daughter & Human Evolution," which at the outset lays out mini bios on these individuals in what he designates "Family and Friends." While not the first biography of Emma, this solid treatment is a valuable addition to the Darwin literature.

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Delalbine

I hesitated for a long time before buying this book for my Kindle, as I was afraid it would focus too much on Emma's religious nature, but that was not at all the case. It is a very enjoyable and interesting biography of Emma's childhood and eventual marriage to cousin Charles Darwin and the story of their lives together, with their many children, deaths, births, travels, Charles' work, etc..I love biographical books dealing with the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and this one is one of the best I have read. I found myself getting to know each of their children and their personalities, aided by bits of letters. They were all good letter-writers and all had strong personalities, as well as many illnesses, some real and life-threatening, others (Henrietta) possibly a bit more imaginary.

All in all, a very good read.

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Urreur

I believe, perhaps, this might well be, the very type of story my own dear sister might enjoy passing time with. Though there certainly is documented much illness & death during 3+ generations, & during periods in history where modern medicine hadn't yet taken hold (Nightengale first began her institution of nursing 'round WWI, that being mid-end of this tale). Mercury in medicine, & screwy "water cures" & marrying first cousins, all took tole/toll upon mental & physical health, & that is

documented at infinitum!!!

Often, you might find yourself skimming or scanning "sick-bed-diatribes!" Though for me, I wanted the entire historical perspective, to build ideas for a project I'm writing about the era.

Here is laid out for us to learn from, wonder about, be entertained from, not a novel with imaginary characters. An extended, wealthy, powerful & famous family's history, over 150 years ago. Documenting a time period, being lived through @ the very time, by many different authors with perspective, personalities, hope, love & dreams. And sorrow; plenty misery and heartbreak, both romantic & familial. More than enough despair & physical ill health!

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