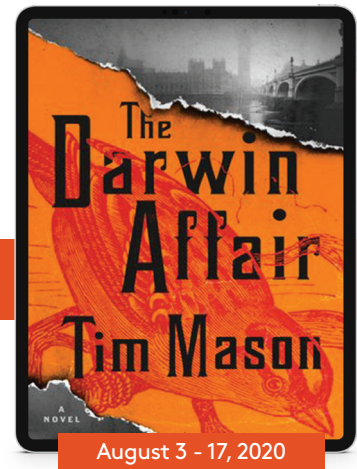


- 1.** In his 1852 novel *Bleak House*, Charles Dickens created a detective called Inspector Bucket who was widely thought to be based on Charles Field, a historical London policeman. The fictional Charles Field in *The Darwin Affair* seems plagued by the fame thrust upon him by Dickens. In what ways might celebrity have become a burden for Field? For anyone?
- 2.** The reactions to the initial publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* ranged from vehement condemnation to the highest praise. Is it surprising that there was not universal condemnation of it in 1859, but some acceptance, even among prominent churchmen? We've now lived with the theory of evolution for 160 years, and it is accepted by a vast majority of scientists as fact. Is it surprising that Darwin's findings still provoke outrage? Why might this be so?
- 3.** Inspector Charles Field and his wife, Jane Field, often address each other in conversation as Mr. and Mrs.; this was a Victorian convention. But their relationship isn't defined by the seeming formality of their address. How would you describe the relationship?
- 4.** There have been many recent film and television depictions of Queen Victoria and Albert, the Prince Consort. How do these square with the relationship as described in *The Darwin Affair*? How would you describe the marriage of these two very different people?
- 5.** On the opposite end of the social scale from the royal family is Tom Ginty, butcher's apprentice. He's snatched and put in a box. How does this affect the chemistry of the story? How does his mother deal with his disappearance? How do you?
- 6.** The author has included many historical persons in the novel, from Victoria and Albert, to Karl Marx and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, to Charles Darwin and his wife, Emma. Sir Richard Owen was also a historical person, and although he did not really conspire to assassinate anyone, he was notorious for his malice and a propensity to claim the ideas of others as his own. How do you feel about using real-life persons from history in this manner? Is it fair for an author to do this? What liberties may, or may not, be taken?



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- 7.** In June of 1860 Karl Marx was indeed suffering from liver pains, as his character complains in the book. Tim Mason learned this fact by reading Marx’s letters while doing research for this novel; he also read some of Queen Victoria’s letters. How else might a novelist seek to learn day-to-day details from a historical subject’s past?
- 8.** Decimus Cobb is a complex character, to put it mildly. More than one critic has compared him to Hannibal Lecter of Thomas Harris’s *Silence of the Lambs*. Is he a monster? The fictional Charles Darwin says to Field, “I disbelieve in monsters. But I have found ordinary nature to be insupportably cruel, often enough.” What emotions does Decimus evoke? Fear? Revulsion? Curiosity?
- 9.** The world’s response to the work of Darwin was echoed on an intimate scale by the relationship between Charles and his beloved wife, Emma. His masterwork became her sorrow, and yet they remained a steadfast, loving couple, and devoted parents to their many children. Are there clues in *The Darwin Affair* as to how they navigated these complexities?
- 10.** We glimpse another complex relationship in the love affair between the young Oxford undergraduates David Gates and Jack Callow. The term homosexuality did not come into existence until about forty years after the time period of the book, nor did the concept exist as we think of it today. Can you speculate on how these two might have defined their relationship?

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