



Dear Reader,

I couldn't be more thrilled that you're about to join with many others worldwide, each of you reading *The Darwin Affair*, more or less at the same time. I've spent much of my life working in theater, writing plays and watching, hearing, and feeling audiences respond to them. But send a novel into the world, and the author can feel all alone, with the audience distant, silent, unknown.

Which is sort of what we're all feeling currently, isolated as we are by the pandemic.

Here, though, OverDrive's Big Library Read is about to re-create an almost theatrical community of readers, all experiencing this story at once, and connecting with one another as they do. We're not alone!

I've long loved reading and re-reading Victorian novelists, the works of Charles Dickens in particular. Wouldn't it be fun, I always thought, to take the unforgettable detective of Bleak House, Mr. Bucket, and make him the leading character in a novel all his own? But the story that gathered in my mind around him involved actual historical figures: Darwin, Victoria and Albert, Bishop Wilberforce, et al. I didn't want these real folks interacting with someone else's fictional character.

But then I discovered Mr. Bucket had a real-life counterpart, a very real London police detective named Charles Field, profiled by Dickens in an essay before he turned him into a fictional character. This gave me permission to proceed. When I learned that Charles Darwin's name had appeared on the Queen's Honors List of those to be knighted in the New Year, just weeks after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, I had the hook on which to hang my fiction, because this was an honor Mr. Darwin would never receive.

I hope you in the Big Library Read audience enjoy reading *The Darwin Affair* at least half as much as I loved writing it.

Yours,

Tim Mason

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