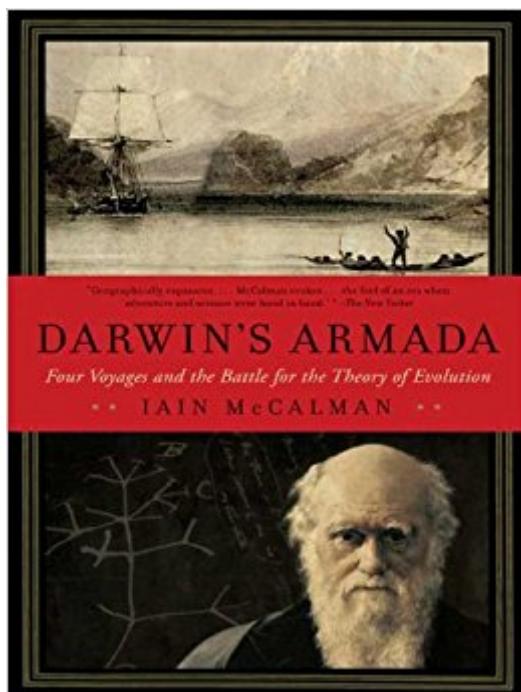


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Darwin's Armada: Four Voyages And The Battle For The Theory Of Evolution



Synopsis

"Sparkling...an extraordinary true-adventure story, complete with trials, tribulations and moments of exultation." Kirkus Reviews, starred review Award-winning cultural historian Iain McCalman tells the stories of Charles Darwin and his staunchest supporters: Joseph Hooker, Thomas Huxley, and Alfred Wallace. Beginning with the somber morning of April 26, 1882—the day of Darwin's funeral—Darwin's Armada steps back and recounts the lives and scientific discoveries of each of these explorers, who campaigned passionately in the war of ideas over evolution and advanced the scope of Darwin's work.

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Customer Reviews

This book tells the story of four men and their voyages to often uncharted areas of the world in the pursuit of a new idea regarding how living things—humans, animals, birds, amphibians, fish, plants—were formed. In other words, they eventually coined the word Evolution. The author follows each of these men from their young days to youth and maturity (1830s to 1880s) and writes of their similarities and differences and eventual friendships as

collaborators. Charles Darwin voyaged in the Beagle five years to South America, New Zealand and Australia, observing and comparing life forms, from minuscule sea life to chimpanzees. Joseph Hooker, a botanist, traveled in the Erebus around the very southern oceans between New Zealand, and parts of Australia, Africa and South America and adjacent islands, reaching Antarctica. He studied mosses, lichens, and seaweeds. Thomas Huxley, from a more middle class than Darwin and Hooker, in the Rattlesnake traveled between 1846 and 1850 along the east coast of Australia and New Guinea studying jellyfish. The fourth explorer was Alfred Wallace who explored the and Southeast Asia which included modern Indonesia. He was poor but read Darwin's book while self-educating himself through the use of the Mechanics Library set up for the working class in Britain. He also read *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* which favored the idea of progressive change in life forms. These influences encouraged him to begin collecting insects and plants. Eventually, he boarded a ship in Liverpool and began his life as an observer and collector. All four of these men suffered physically and mentally in their travels. Contacts with so-called primitive people opened a whole new, and often shocking, way of living. Comparisons from animals to human, from "savages" to "civilized" men are made by each of them. Eventually all four meet and develop friendships and discuss what we now call The Theory of Evolution. This book is detailed, exciting, and very informative.

Darwin's Armada: Four Voyages and the Battle for the Theory of Evolution Readers have many new books on Charles Darwin and evolution to choose from in this bicentennial year of Darwin's birth. Darwin's Armada surely must rank among the better ones suitable for a broad audience. It consists of five parts. The first four recount the exploration expedition experiences of Darwin, Joseph Hooker, Thomas Huxley, and Alfred Wallace. The fifth describes the events surrounding the publication of Darwin's and Wallace's papers on evolution and the subsequent battles to win support for their theory. The first four sections serve as good short biographies for significant parts of these men's careers, particularly useful to readers not already versed in the lives of one or more of them. McCalman, a distinguished Australian professor, places emphasis on their southern Pacific experiences, though not exclusively. None of the four was an accomplished naturalist when they first set out on their respective voyages, and one of the values of McCalman's accounts is to show how they learned on the job. He highlights how Darwin and Wallace, in particular, developed evolutionary insights from their observations of animals and plants in isolated island habitats. McCalman underscores the social class differences among these men, and illustrates how class affected their careers and interactions with the scientific community. Darwin was from a

distinguished family, but Wallace fit with the working-class and was self-educated. Hooker and Huxley fit in between, and both struggled financially at times. I found Part Five "The Armada at War, 1859-82" to be the most rewarding. It shows how the connections among these men coalesced and why they mattered. Hooker and Darwin became friends since the mid 1840s and Hooker served as the principal sounding board for the ideas Darwin was developing about evolution. Huxley, whom Darwin first met in 1853, had to be won over, but he ultimately became the most effective publicist for Darwin's views. The action intensifies in 1858 when Darwin received Wallace's paper "On the Tendency of Varieties to Depart Indefinitely from the Original Type," which closely aligned with Darwin's own ideas about evolution, not yet published. Darwin's friends, particularly Hooker and the geologist Charles Lyell, were concerned that Darwin not be pre-empted, and they quickly arranged for the joint reading of Darwin and Wallace papers at the Linnean Society on July 1, 1858.

McCalman provides a fine account of that proceeding. He concludes that Darwin's friends had sought to advance Darwin's position versus that of Wallace, but that without their efforts Wallace's paper would likely have received no hearing. McCalman does a good job of summarizing certain similarities and differences between the ideas of Darwin and Wallace. He mildly suggests that social class played a role in the ascendency of Darwin as the recognized innovator. Darwin clearly had one advantage: he had the leisure in 1858-1859 to pull together his thoughts into *On the Origin of Species*, while Wallace was still busy trying to earn a living collecting in the Malay Archipelago. Darwin would later help to arrange a government pension for Wallace. The book begins and ends with Darwin's 1882 funeral at Westminster Abbey, a venue promoted by Huxley, ever the publicist. Huxley, Hooker, and Wallace were among the pallbearers.

More than anything else, this book provides an historical context for the introduction of the theory of evolution. British naturalists tended to come from higher class families, though not necessarily families of means. The men described in this book had a passion for knowledge, and endured years of hardship to travel to remote locations in search of specimens. In some sense, the British navy was responsible for the theory of evolution since it outfitted and fully or partially financed the survey expeditions for three of the journeys described in the book. Only Wallace went about his work independently, and he was really a businessman as he had to make a living selling specimens. One thing that becomes clear from this book is the strenuous physical effort required to travel on a ship and then march about various remote and exotic locales in search of new plant and animal specimens. These naturalists also had to be artists so they could draw anatomical structures during dissection as many specimens could not be preserved. They were also writers and scientists,

documenting their finds and then writing books based on their observations in the field. These were impressive men. Another interesting aspect of the book is that it presents the intrigue and politics of maneuvering through the various scientific bodies of mid 19th century England. Darwin's armada, his friends and colleagues, were critical to finally bringing the theory of evolution to light. This was a sea change for science - the old guard of creationist scientists giving way to youthful energy and the strong emergence of empirically based scientific hypotheses. These few men revolutionized biology. The book is an interesting and enjoyable read, and highly recommended.

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