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Censoring the Essentialist Call of the Wild in Amy Newman's "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma"

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Abstract

In "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma," Amy Newman's speaker, Charles Darwin, writes notes to his Victorian wife Emma in an effort to explain the joy in sensuality that he finds in the animal world. Through the poem, the speaker, ostensibly Darwin, often censors himself because he cannot challenge his wife's Victorian values. Thus the poem documents the speaker's struggle with challenging ideas that his wife holds dear. Eventually, the speaker conquers his fears and explains, in very sensual language, that there is in fact a connection between the male wasp and the orchid. In this poem, Amy Newman creates the persona of a well-known Victorian man but allows him to transcend the inhibitions of his time so that he can demonstrate to his wife Emma the intricate connections between the natural world and people.

Keywords

Metabiography, Natural Law, Victorians, Self-Censorship

Amy Newman'ın "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" Şiirinde Doğanın Çağrısının Sansürlenmesi

Öz

Amy Newman'ın "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" adlı şiirindeki anlatıcı, Charles Darwin, eşi Emma'ya hayvanlar aleminde gözlemlediği tensel hazzı açıklamak niyetiyle notlar yazar. Darwin karısının Viktorya döneminin değerlerine karşı çıkamadığı için sıklıkla kendini sansürler. Şiir, anlatıcının karısının değer verdiği görüşleri sorgulama çabasını anlatır. Sonunda, Darwin korkularını yener ve şehvet uyandıran bir dille erkek yabanarısı ve orkide arasında bir tür bağ olduğunu açıklar. Amy Newman bu şiirinde tanınmış bir Viktorya dönemi erkeğini anlatıcı olarak seçer, ancak karısı Emma'ya doğa ve insanlar arasındaki anlaşılması güç bağı gösterebilmesi için onun ait olduğu dönemin yasaklarını aşmasına izin verir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Metabiyografi, Doğa Kanunları, Viktorya Dönemi, Kendini Sansürleme

For many Americans, especially the ones whose information on the subject comes from movies, the Victorian period represents that "state of mind" defined by Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliams in the Introduction to the *Victorian Studies Reader* as restrictive and prudish. In the *Reader*, Boyd and McWilliams point out that the period "meant earnestness, prudery, hypocrisy, overly ornate and elaborate design, bold entrepreneurialism, double standards, snobbery, sentimentality, utilitarianism, imperialism, narrow mindedness, cosy but stifling family life, rote-learning, extreme religiosity, racism, respectability, corporal punishment, hard work and drudgery" (1). In "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma," Amy Newman uses her reader's awareness of the Victorian propensity for "prudery," "cosy but stifling family life," and "extreme religiosity" to examine a man's place in his world, a Victorian man's awareness of his wife's place in her world, but most essentially a man's love for a woman whose Victorian sensibilities force him to censor his own exuberance as his observations of the natural world confirm his theories about our animal natures, human sexuality, the

connection between all living things, and the possibility that the God worshipped by his wife does not exist.

Reading Amy Newman's poem, one is aware that the poet's version of Charles Darwin is a construction brought about by the specific sensibility of a Jewish American woman poet's self-consciousness, the kind of self-consciousness that biographers argue about when they write about metabiography and question how much of the biographer's subjectivity appears in his/her work. Caitríona Ní Dheuill describes metabiography as a "postmodern manifestation of the biographical" ("The Hero as Language Learner" 68) and considers it "the modernist rejection of comprehensive, fact-oriented biography in favor of a more impressionistic, polemical approach" (76). Amy Newman may not be writing a biography, but her poem is about a man who lived at a specific time and carved a very specific history for himself. People know about him, of him, and even though they may not know the truth about him, they enter Newman's poem with preconceived opinions about him. Such preconceived notions may even lead one to question whether the Charles Darwin who appears in Amy Newman's poem could have written the words that the poet attributes to him. Could a Victorian man burdened with the Victorian "state of mind" with which people are so familiar lust so shamelessly in his mind after his wife's sexual favors? Some readers may argue that Amy Newman's Darwin is not an accurate portrait of the real man because he suffers from the influence of the poet's late twentieth-century American culture, a culture in which sex permeates everything.

Separating the late twentieth-century sensibilities of the Jewish American woman poet who may or may not be sexually liberated from the sensibilities of the character whom she creates in her poem should not influence how one reads the poem; however, the separation between a writer and her subject figures prominently in criticism written by biographers such as Edward Saunders because they are concerned about the influence of a writer's sensibilities on what he/she ultimately writes about his/her subject. Saunders, in "Defining Metabiography in Historical Perspective," addresses the question of "authorial self-consciousness" in writing a biography, and he argues that it is "the first hallmark of metabiography" (328). He refers to Wolfgang Hildesheimer's 1977 biography of Mozart as a "meta-biography" because Hildesheimer had claimed that "for him there is no such thing as 'biographical objectivity'" and because Hildesheimer "believes that

biographies should engage with all the unedifying details of a subject's life, and sees self-consciousness, via the emphasis on the author's own subjectivity, as 'the proper method. . . to deal with such material'" (328). Hildesheimer describes his biography of Mozart as "the result of the ability to envision" ("Die Subjektivität des Biographen" 295), which is what Amy Newman is clearly doing when she "envisions" a Charles Darwin who lusts after the woman he loves. The Charles Darwin whom readers encounter in Amy Newman's poem is not supposed to be an accurate portrayal of the historical figure; the poem is not his biography. The Charles Darwin in the poem is instead what Amy Newman envisions as a man in love, even if he was a Victorian.

Paola Loreto hears in Amy Newman's poetry echoes of Wallace Stevens, a poet admired by Newman; as a result, she associates Newman's work with the work of the high modernist poets. In Newman's *Camera Lyrica*, Loreto finds "a pervasive ambiguity of reference that places her poetry in the tradition of high philosophical verse, involving the reader in the process of thinking and making sense of the world" ("In the Modernist Grain" 460). This process of thinking is akin to what Loreto finds in a poem like "Ideas of Order at Key West" in which a woman thinks her way through a poem in order to determine her place in the world. Loreto sees in Newman's poetry "a meditative tone reproducing the sound of a voice thinking, though Newman's voice sounds always more reticent, defended, masked and impersonal, at times sibylline" ("In the Modernist Grain" 460). In Newman's "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma," a poem included in *Camera Lyrica*, the speaker is Charles Darwin as Amy Newman envisions him, her version of what the Victorian naturalist may have been if he had been able to speak his passion through his notes, and as Loreto points out, the reader hears through the poem the voice of a man thinking, which is exactly why Carol Rumens, in a review of the poem for *The Guardian*, describes it as "a set of lost notes jotted by Charles Darwin for his wife Emma" during an unspecified trip of scientific exploration. The notes, however, were not written by the real Darwin, and they were never "lost."

The romantic reader who reads "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" wishes that the notes had been written on that first voyage on the *HMS Beagle*, but this is not possible because Darwin and Emma were not married when he first sailed on the *HMS Beagle* between December 1831 and October 1836. Darwin's marriage to his cousin Emma Wedgwood did not take place until January 1839. The notes that

Newman's Darwin writes to Emma could not have been written during that fateful journey when Darwin, the naturalist, developed his theories of evolution. In fact, between 1831 and 1836, Emma and Darwin, who were cousins, were not even courting. According to Charles Darwin's record in *The Autobiography*, Emma was living in Maer Hall, Staffordshire, where she was taking care of a sick aunt. Emma and Charles knew each other because they were cousins, but Charles did not even consider marriage to Emma until he ran into her in 1838 when he was forced by ill health to take some time off from his work.

After that fateful meeting when they have time to talk, Charles begins to think about marriage and, true to his scientific nature, writes a long list of pros and cons where he includes the observation that marriage would provide him with a "constant companion and a friend in old age" which was "better than a dog anyhow" (*The Autobiography* 232), not exactly the stuff of romantic poems, but when he visits Emma in July 1838, he finds himself discussing his findings on what would become his theory of evolution, a theory which he already knows she finds objectionable. Emma Wedgwood was a devout Unitarian, someone who, soon after he proposed in November 1838, admitted to him her fear that there was a void between them. She writes to him "When I am with you I think all melancholy thoughts keep out of my head but since you are gone some sad ones have forced themselves in, of fear that our opinions on the most important subject should differ widely" (Darwin Correspondence Project Letter 441). Her most important subject is religion and her views on it, which she knows differ from Darwin's views. She assures him, "My reason tells me that honest & conscientious doubts cannot be a sin, but I feel it would be a painful void between us" (Darwin Correspondence Project Letter 441).

From the very beginning of their relationship, Emma knows that Charles Darwin's views on religion differ from her own views, and she concludes this particular letter in which she expresses her fears by telling him, "I thank you from my heart for your openness with me & I should dread the feeling that you were concealing your opinions from the fear of giving me pain" (Darwin Correspondence Project Letter 441). Thus, in this letter, the idea that between Emma and Charles exist "honest and conscientious doubts" that will cause their relationship to suffer becomes clear. They are both aware of their differences, but this awareness does not keep Emma from accepting Charles' proposal of marriage, although it does seem to make Charles conscious of his

difference. He writes in *The Autobiography* that, during his voyage on the *HMS Beagle*, he considered himself "orthodox" in his Christian beliefs and states that he was "heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality" (*The Autobiography* 85), but he also admits that he had "gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament from its manifestly false history of the world, with the Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc., etc., and from its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian" (*The Autobiography* 85). Clearly, his scientific mind teaches him that a lot of what Emma believes is not credible.

The core values of the Victorian period frame Amy Newman's poem. They are not the most important subject matter in the poem, but one cannot think about the poem without knowing what some of these values were. Daniel Joseph Singal, in "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," summarizes the Victorian "core values" when he writes that Victorians believed

> in a predictable universe presided over by a benevolent God and governed by immutable natural laws, a corresponding conviction that humankind was capable of arriving at a unified and fixed set of truths about all aspects of life, and an insistence on preserving absolute standards based on a radical dichotomy between that which was deemed 'human' and that regarded as 'animal.' (9)

Living in a predictable universe with immutable laws and a distinct separation between everything "animal" that was not "human" provided the Victorians with a strong sense of their place in the universe. According to Singal, for the Victorians, the "moral dichotomy" created by the difference between all things animal and all things human

> constituted the deepest guiding principle of the Victorian outlook. On the 'human' or 'civilized' side of the dividing line fell everything that served to lift man above the beasts—education, refinement, manners, the arts, religion, and such domesticated emotions as loyalty and family love. The 'animal' or 'savage' realm, by contrast, contained those

> instincts and passions that constantly threatened self-control, and which therefore had to be repressed at all cost. (9)

Darwin's observations of the animal world and man's place in that world cross the line dividing civilized behavior and animal behavior, which explains why his theories were so controversial.

Amy Newman's "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" specifically focuses on this line crossed by Darwin when he writes about his longing for his wife and when he sees the similarity between the performance of the animals and what he longs to do with his wife. Amy Newman's Darwin longs to behave like the wasp that he sees in the wild, a longing that cuts across the dividing line between civilized and animal behavior. Singal finishes his summary of the Victorian core values by naming what Victorians saw as a threat to their way of life, and he claims that "foremost among these threats was of course sexuality, which proper Victorians conceived of as a hidden geyser of animality existing within everyone and capable of erupting with little or no warning at the slightest stimulus" (9). To control animality, "all erotic temptations were accordingly supposed to be rooted out, sexual pleasure even within marriage was to be kept to a minimum, and, as Nancy F. Cott has shown, the standard of respectable conduct, especially for women, shifted decisively 'from modesty to passionlessness'" (9). Darwin violates these values when his scientific investigations open his eyes to the unabashed sensuality of the animal world and he learns that there is in fact no difference between humans and animals. Amy Newman's Darwin, in fact, seems to prefer the animal side, even as he also realizes that his preference challenges many of the beliefs that his wife holds dear.

Charles Darwin's Christian beliefs or lack thereof are a major concern to Emma, and Carol Rumens argues in her review of "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" for *The Guardian* that "the poem also hints at the one shadow on their intimacy," but she goes on to emphasize that "what Charles cannot fully express to conventionally-religious Emma is not his sexual desire but his atheism. He has come to see religious belief simply as a phase in human evolution. The seventh verse ('we have acquired some idea of the lapse of time') expresses an idea of 'creation' so daunting that Darwin erases it." Rumens comes to this conclusion from reading parts of the poem in which Darwin, the speaker, censors himself when he writes down ideas that he knows

would offend Emma. Even though he is presumably writing in his journal, a private record of his own ideas, he is still painfully aware of what he can and cannot discuss with Emma. He attempts to tell her about evolution when he writes:

> ~~we have acquired some idea of the lapse of time;~~
> ~~the mind cannot grasp the full meaning of the term~~
> ~~of even a million years~~ ("Unfinished Notes" 27)

But he censors himself by crossing out the lines because he knows that his statement challenges her understanding that life was created in a garden and that all creation appears as God intended it, without evolutionary changes over millions of years. The self-censorship practiced by Darwin in "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" provides an interesting commentary on the kind of man created by Amy Newman more than 150 years after Emma Wedgwood and Charles Darwin met and married. Although he is recognizably the man who sailed on the *HMS Beagle* to new ideas that would challenge the status quo of his time, he is also a man concerned about what people think of him and about the sensibilities of the woman he loves.

Amy Newman's poem does not expressly concern itself with the subject of Charles Darwin's views on religion, but those views cannot be hidden or erased because they influence the man whose voice emerges through every line of the poem. Darwin's preoccupation with his beloved affects his way of thinking throughout the poem, so the poem's focus lies on the more interesting topic of Darwin's balancing act between what was considered proper and what he saw as natural, his very sensual longing for a woman who was probably prudish and not terribly inclined to see the kinds of connections that he was likely to see between the animal world and the more "civilized" world of the people of her time. Newman's Darwin contemplates

> The similar framework of bones in the hand of a man,
> wing of a bat,
> fin of the porpoise,
> leg of the horse. ("Unfinished Notes" 29)

These connections lead the scientist to see "the same pattern in the wing and the leg of a bat, / in the petals, stamens, and pistils of flowers" ("Unfinished Notes" 30). In these patterns, Darwin realizes that all of creation is connected, that people as well as animals that were

then considered "base," like the bat, share the same network of bones and veins, the same desires, and he concludes that "This is a matter of perfection, over time, / and complication" ("Unfinished Notes" 30).

The connection with the animal side of things, the sensual side of people, the very same thing that Emma and other Christians found reprehensible and sought to censor, provides Charles Darwin with a clear sense that people are more like the animals than they would like to believe. Carol Rumens claims in her review of the poem that "the series of haiku-like observations and miniature poems mirrors the delicate, precise, interdependent constructions that Darwin himself detected in nature. We seem to witness a mind in the process of realizing that humanity, no less than the orchid or the wasp, is part of this vast, intricate pattern." She claims that the voice of the poet in this poem "is informal, sensuous, coolly explicatory, and at times unguardedly excited […]. The reader can sense acutely those moments when Emma's lover becomes 'flustered' with pleasure and desire," as the speaker does indeed become flustered when he tries to explain to his wife the natural process of procreation.

> Bees cut holes and suck the nectar
> at the bases of certain flowers, which,
> with a very little more trouble, they can enter
>
> at the mouth ("Unfinished Notes" 27)

Entering a flower at the mouth provides one of the images flustering the scientist who tries to explain to the woman he loves the ways in which animals and even flowers in the natural world behave in order to survive. The image, however, is sensual, sexual, unrestrained, created by a man whose engagement with the wild but nevertheless necessary and commonplace side of nature fills him with the longing to answer nature's call, to enter his flower with the same reckless abandon.

The thinking voice of the flustered speaker explains the natural process of propagation by stressing the relationship between all living things, the complex connection between flowers and insects. He tells Emma how

> The mistletoe depends on birds to spread its seeds, the
> flowers depend on insects, it is all
> a series of increasingly apparent

relationships. Nature moves
in profitable steps.

To propagate, the orchid,
I am flustered to write,
requires the cooperation

of the male wasp, and so resembles
("Unfinished Notes" 27)

The thought of what the male wasp resembles is left unfinished at this point, probably because the speaker feels that he has gone too far in his choice of words, in creating images that are too risqué for his wife, but the poet manipulates the reader's emotions through her use of silence, of words left unsaid.

Through Darwin's self-censorship, Newman introduces the daring, maybe even dangerous idea of one man's lust and its similarity to the task performed by the male wasp when it enters the orchid; then, she leaves this comparison hanging, playfully withholding words that would not only finish the thought but also make a statement that challenges the convention of the time. In this case, Amy Newman follows Margaret Dickie's logic in "The Alien in Contemporary Women's Poetry" to let her creation, Darwin, speak words that challenge the status quo. Dickie points out that "frequently, the lyric voice of women's poetry is engaged in dialogue with an absent other whose language is that of the dominant culture, which the speaker has internalized or been forced to use" (303). Newman makes it clear that the Darwin of her creation is struggling not only with the words but also with the meaning behind the words that he is trying to say. In "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma," Darwin's struggle becomes clear through his hesitancy and, eventually, his inability to say what he wants to say. Darwin crosses out the offending lines concerning the lapse of time in order to censor himself, to censor the statement that he knows challenges what Emma believes, but this censoring voice does not last long because he picks the topic up again later when he tells Emma that the behavior of the animals is "a matter of perfection, over time" (30). At this point, he more boldly dares to finish the challenging, disturbing thought in one of the most sensual passages in the poem.

In a review of *Camera Lyrica* for *Harvard Review*, Douglas K. Currier complains about "the seemingly complex intellect and emotion" (144) in Newman's poetry and wonders whether he would be impressed with the book if he could understand "the mystery of the lines where I am lacking grammatical guidance" (144). Apparently, Currier is "troubled by the grammatical ambiguity of many of Newman's lines" (143), and he adds that he has a "problem not so much with the disregard for standard English grammar, but with the idea that perhaps the depth, the richness, the complexity, the mystery of the lines where I am lacking grammatical guidance may depend in part on just this lack" (143-144). He concludes that he would not be impressed because he apparently does not "enjoy difficulty for its own sake" (144) and dismisses the book without even mentioning "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma" or "In Medias Res," two of the best poems in the collection. What Currier misses when he dismisses Newman's use of "grammatical ambiguity" is the playful way in which the poet manipulates the language to create not only a sense of longing but also the moral dilemma facing Darwin, the speaker in this particular poem. He is in love with a woman who cannot share what he has learned about the animal side of human nature from scientific observation, and Newman gets this point across precisely through her use of words left unsaid, incomplete ideas, possible silences that encode the "ungrammatical" line with meaning. One wonders as one reads the poem exactly what lies beyond, what the speaker means by what he cannot say or refuses to say.

In words left unsaid, Amy Newman writes about sex, about the sexual connection in the animal world. Darwin's words reflect his need to share with the woman he loves one of the most obvious things he learns through his exposure to the animal world, the uncensored sensuality of the natural world. When "the orchids, / those flowers that you so admire" ("Unfinished Notes" 26), manage to attract the wasp into helping her propagate her species, they do so out of an intrinsic need to reproduce and thereby survive. The performance of the orchids is both natural and sensual. He explains that

> To propagate, the orchid
> requires the participation of
>
> the male wasp, to get the pollen
> on his legs, and to get him to transfer

the pollen to other orchids.
The orchid must resemble genitalia,

a female wasp, her body,
so the insect will copulate

with the flower. The orchids had to become
desirable, so this man wasp

will alight from one to another,
cross-pollinating. She wears her color

like flesh, and scents brazenly
for him: spreading herself in the cooler air;

her sweet interior; the fumbling
of the dizzy wasp. This did not happen

as a whim. This is
an extremely intricate subject.
("Unfinished Notes" 28-29)

That an orchid must become desirable to a "man" wasp and must spread herself for him succinctly describes the natural world. What Darwin learns from his study of the orchids and the wasps is that the two are linked; for the species to survive, the orchids need the wasps, so they must somehow attract the animals that will help them survive. At this point in the poem, the speaker finally finishes his original explanation of the apparent connection between living things, the point earlier left unfinished when he censors himself just as he is about to document the "cooperation of the male wasp" that somehow resembles something that he cannot name. What he refuses to mention in the earlier passage is the sensual way in which the orchid attracts the wasp in order to survive, a performance that offers no tinge of discomfort or an awareness of impropriety. The flower scents; the male wasp cooperates; the deed is done. Shame has no place in the performance of nature. The speaker in Newman's poem, during his observation of the natural world, becomes sadly aware of the joyful

display of animal nature missing in human society and possibly in his own relationship with Emma. He clearly wants his woman to "wear her color / like flesh" and maybe scent "brazenly" for him because, as he admits to her, "I think of you especially as we observe the orchids" ("Unfinished Notes" 26).

What Charles Darwin learns about people during his journey on the *HMS Beagle* is now a matter of record, but what he tells Emma about his findings so alarms her that she asks him to read the Bible. In November of 1838, Emma concludes one of her letters to Charles with:

> It is perhaps foolish of me to say this much but my own dear Charley we now do belong to each other & I cannot help being open with you. Will you do me a favour? Yes I am sure you will, it is to read our Saviour's farewell discourse to his disciples which begins at the end of the 13th Chap of John. It is so full of love to them & devotion & every beautiful feeling. It is the part of the New Testament I love best. This is a whim of mine it would give me great pleasure, though I can hardly tell why I don't wish you to give me your opinion about it. (Darwin Correspondence Project Letter 441)

Chapter 13 of John has many layers; on one level, it reveals Christ's love for his disciples, but the story is also about betrayal, about faith that will not last through the night. It is clear from her request that he read this chapter that Emma recognizes the ideological differences between her and the man who has asked her to marry him. Eventually, she admits to him her belief that his "doubts" would separate them in the afterlife, but in January of 1839 she also admits that she may be too happy married to him to care much about her own doubts, which suggests that she fears that marriage to a non-believer could remove her from the presence of God. She writes that "though our opinions may not agree upon all points of religion we may sympathize a good deal in our *feelings* on the subject," and she adds that her "chief danger will be that I shall lead so happy comfortable & amusing a life that I shall be careless & good for nothing & think of nothing serious in this world or the next" (Darwin Correspondence Project Letter 492).

Emma's concern that she would be so happily married as to disregard the religious differences that exist between her and Charles

suggests that their marriage was in fact a happy one. They had ten children and maintained an extensive correspondence with each other as well as with friends and family members. The letters reveal a happy family, not the kind of family ruled by a despotic father figure that so many people have come to associate with Victorian households. Amy Newman knows that most readers will assume that, as a woman of her time, someone living at the beginning of the Victorian period, Emma was part of the "age that trumpeted high ideals and Christian values" (Boyd and McWilliams 2) over human relationships. Victorians like Emma, according to Boyd and McWilliams, lived in a world of "fussy furniture, stiff upper lips, lengthy sermons and inward-looking, repressed lives" (2). Whether this is true or not matters little because this is what most people have come to associate with the Victorian period and upper class people of the time, so Amy Newman's poem uses this shared awareness of the Victorian people and their habits in order to create a portrait of a man who censors himself as he attempts to communicate to his wife the joy of animal sexuality and all things sensual in nature.

The topic of self-censorship has become an important one for scholars who study politics and the behavior of people in the political arena. In "Turbulences in the Climate of Opinion," Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann defines public opinion as "controversial opinions that one is *able* to express in public without becoming isolated" (145), but she also points out that "in societies and in periods where social change is slow, no strenuous observation of the social environment is necessary to avoid isolation: the norms, expected and approved patterns of behavior, are known as well as the dominant opinions" (145). Thus public opinion "expresses the notion of an outside world surrounding the individual and influencing him in his behavior and feelings whether he likes it or not" (145). Like Noelle-Neumann, A. F. Hayes points out that most people "recognize the strong psychological pressure to moderate or silence one's opinion expression when that opinion is perceived to be in the minority" ("Exploring the Forms of Self-Censorship" 786). Apparently, people know automatically to censor themselves when they harbor opinions that challenge the status quo or would get them in trouble, especially in the case of politicians whose uncensored thoughts would lose them public support.

Although Charles Darwin was not a politician, he came from a prominent family, so the need not to embarrass himself or his family

must have been strong, and history proves that the outside world influences the real Charles Darwin enough to censor himself. He writes in his autobiography that:

> In 1838, that is, fifteen months after I had begun my systematic enquiry, I happened to read for amusement Malthus on *Population*, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species. Here, then, I had at last got a theory by which to work; but I was so anxious to avoid prejudice, that I determined not for some time to write even the briefest sketch of it. (*The Autobiography of Charles Darwin* 120)

That he was "so anxious to avoid prejudice" that he decides "not for some time to write even the briefest sketch of it" suggests that Darwin was in fact afraid to challenge the status quo and incur displeasure. He does not dare risk displeasure until June of 1842 when he "first allowed myself the satisfaction of writing a very brief abstract of my theory in pencil in 35 pages; and this was enlarged during the summer of 1844 into one of 230 pages, which I had fairly copied out and still possess" (*The Autobiography of Charles Darwin* 120).

Amy Newman's Darwin, the man who questions his statements and censors them, is therefore a rather accurate version of the real man who postponed writing his thesis because he feared what people would think of him. In "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion," Noelle-Neumann points out that "to the individual, not isolating himself is more important than his own judgment. This appears to be a condition of life in human society; if it were otherwise, sufficient integration could not be achieved" (43). Amy Newman uses this fear of being isolated from society to create a sensitive man, one who is willing to hide his ideas in order to avoid his wife's displeasure, but he is also a man in love suffering the distance between him and the woman he loves, in more ways than one. While he is on the ship, he is physically separated from his beloved, but the poem makes it seem as if these two people are also separated by an emotional space that Emma cannot cross even when the two are together. Darwin's

visions of his wife are always loving and positive, but it is very clear that Emma has not heard the call of the wild to which his entire body now responds. At one point, he asks her, "Do you remember that one morning I smelled of nectar?" only to respond, "Darling, the world is feral, and we are natives" ("Unfinished Notes" 27).

In "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma," a man's love for his wife is clearly physical, and his memory of her body pervades his every thought and returns to remind him of how much he misses her. The man who in real life writes in his journal that marrying would provide him with "a constant companion and a friend in old age" which to him appears "better than a dog anyhow" (*The Autobiography* 232) now clearly wants more than companionship. Amy Newman's Darwin thinks:

> I am remembering your subtle throat, how in the heat
> your skin will almost pearl. Underneath your dress of skin
> all that fragile blood. You are this morning
>
> a field of clover, and I feel drawn to this,
> a humble-bee. I am carried in the world's
> mouth ("Unfinished Notes" 29)

These are not the thoughts of a man thinking about a companion but a lover. He longs for her body as a bee would be drawn, instinctively, to a field of clover. By the end of the poem, he once again mentions the intricate connections between all living things, "The same pattern in the wing and the leg of a bat, / in the petals, stamens, and pistils of flowers" ("Unfinished Notes" 30), and reiterates:

> This is a matter of perfection, over time,
> and complication. Did the orchid have the means
> to think itself into seducing, to adapt as idea
> the perfect dress of reproduction,
> the female wasp
>
> a bit of fur and soft petals
> curved like its soft parts ("Unfinished Notes" 30)

His hope is that Emma will hear what he identifies as natural behavior in his study of the natural world, that she can "have the means

/ to think [herself] into seducing" her man, that she can be less a product of her time and more in tune with her animal side. He ends these lines with the statement: "Last night a dream: you and I dusted in pollen / I would like to believe" ("Unfinished Notes" 30). Amy Newman's Darwin is almost pleading with the woman he loves to hear the call of the wild and be like a brazen orchid to his male wasp. His notes to Emma are a passionate call to shed the inhibitions of her time and join him on the wild side.

In "Darwin's Unfinished Notes to Emma," Amy Newman knows that her readers, almost two hundred years removed from the Victorian period, have a limited knowledge on the subject, but she uses what they share as common knowledge, what Boyd and McWilliams identify as "extreme religiosity" and "cosy but stifling family life" (1), to create a character who subtly but consciously denies what religion has taught him and chooses the sensual, wild side of the animal world. This constitutes a radical departure from his Victorian upbringing for the real Charles Darwin, but Amy Newman makes it clear that, for the scientist, there is no choice other than the joyous exuberance of nature and the animal world. The poem stands as a simplified version of what Darwin learns from the natural world, but most importantly as his confession of love for his wife, a woman whose religious sensibilities will be challenged by her husband's theories. The notes that Darwin writes to Emma during his expedition attest to his own awareness that Emma cannot agree that animals, including human beings, have evolved and changed, as he states, over "~~the lapse of time~~" ("Unfinished Notes" 27). He knows that her religious beliefs will not allow her to accept his theory of evolution, but the notes also demonstrate his willingness to censor himself in order to avoid hurting her. Darwin's notes to Emma confess to a man's love for his wife and his hope that one day she will join him in his appreciation of the wild side of nature.

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