

Creation

“Creation” dramatizes the crucial middle years of a 19th-century titan, Charles Darwin, when he both lost a cherished child—nine-year-old Annie—and finished the manuscript that would become “On the Origin of Species.” This is a decent biopic, based on a book by Darwin’s great-great-grandson Randal Keynes, with Paul Bettany as the struggling naturalist and Jennifer Connelly as his pious wife Emma.

The drama of “Creation” turns not only on a child’s sickness but, even more importantly, on Darwin’s epoch-making discoveries that run smack into his wife’s traditional religious faith. His own lifework is undercutting his family life, his life-long faith, and the church community. The peak of the drama is: will intractable Emma actually allow him to publish his masterwork—whose premises she abhors--or will he consign it to the flames on her behalf?

These are legitimate struggles which “Creation,” directed by Jon Amiel, portrays fairly convincingly. The performances are solid down the line, with the child newcomer Martha West a lovely presence as Annie. For me, however, Paul Bettany’s woeful agonies throughout (he is indeterminately sick a good bit of the picture) wore on me; you just want Ol’ Chas to lighten up after a while and do something silly for once. *(Rated PG-13; 108 minutes)*

(January 2010)