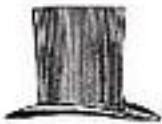


# Angels and Ages

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## Angels and Ages:



A Short Book  
*about Darwin, Lincoln,  
and Modern Life*



Adam Gopnik

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出版者:Knopf

出版时间:2009-1-27

装帧:Hardcover

isbn:9780307270788

On a memorable day in human history, February 12, 1809, two babies were born an ocean apart: Abraham Lincoln in a one-room Kentucky log cabin; Charles Darwin on an English country estate. It was a time of backward-seeming notions, when almost everyone still accepted the biblical account of creation as the literal truth and authoritarianism as the most natural and viable social order. But by the time both men died, the world had changed: ordinary people understood that life on earth was a story of continuous evolution, and the Civil War had proved that a democracy could fight for principles and endure. And with these signal insights much else had changed besides. Together, Darwin and Lincoln had become midwives to the spirit of a new world, a new kind of hope and faith.

Searching for the men behind the icons of emancipation and evolution, Adam Gopnik shows us, in this captivating double life, Lincoln and Darwin as they really were: family men and social climbers; ambitious manipulators and courageous adventurers; the living husband, father, son, and student behind each myth. How do we reconcile Lincoln, the supremely good man we know, with the hardened commander who wittingly sent tens of thousands of young soldiers to certain death? Why did the relentlessly rational Darwin delay publishing his “Great Idea” for almost twenty years? How did inconsolable grief at the loss of a beloved child change each man? And what comfort could either find—for himself or for a society now possessed of a sadder, if wiser, understanding of our existence? Such human questions and their answers are the stuff of this book.

Above all, we see Lincoln and Darwin as thinkers and writers—as makers and witnesses of the great change in thought that marks truly modern times: a hundred years after the Enlightenment, the old rule of faith and fear finally yielding to one of reason, argument, and observation not merely as intellectual ideals but as a way of life; the judgment of divinity at last submitting to the verdicts of history and time. Lincoln considering human history, Darwin reflecting on deep time—both reshaped our understanding of what life is and how it attains meaning. And they invented a new language to express that understanding. *Angels and Ages* is an original and personal account of the creation of the liberal voice—of the way we live now and the way we talk at home and in public. Showing that literary eloquence is essential to liberal civilization, Adam Gopnik reveals why our heroes should be possessed by the urgency of utterance, obsessed by the need to see for themselves, and endowed with the gift to speak for us all.

作者介绍:

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