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The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle. Edited by Ian Campbell, Aileen Christianson, David Sorensen, et al. Volume 40: January 1864–August 1864. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. xxxiii + 254 pp. \$70 [institutions]; \$30 [individuals].

THIS LATEST VOLUME OF *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* focuses on the first eight months of the year 1864, a time of serious and mysterious illness for Jane, whose physical and mental condition is the subject of the vast majority of the 242 letters collected here. Due to Jane's illness—her symptoms included intense pain, profound weakness, recurring depression, and persistent insomnia—the bulk of the letters, about two-thirds, are by Thomas, and about one-third are by Jane. Ten letters written by Jane's cousin Maggie Welsh—while Jane was virtually incapacitated and Maggie was her primary caregiver—are also included. As Jane Roberts notes in her highly informative introduction to the volume, despite the attentions of a variety of physicians, there was “no clear consensus as to what was actually wrong with JWC” (xi), whose illness began in late 1863, and which may or may not be related to an injury from a fall in September of that year.

Although her various doctors were unable to determine a precise cause that would explain the anguish she was obviously feeling, on more than one occasion Jane pinpoints the locus of her pain, writing in March to her aunts that “the malady is in my womb” (43), and explaining similarly to her friend Mary Russell two months later that there is “an everlasting torture in my *womb*” (109). It is for this reason that she rejects the opinions of John Carlyle, Thomas's brother, writing to her husband in

late April to say, "I fear, as John has had no practice at what they call 'a Lady's Dr,' he can suggest nothing either 'at random,' or on reflection, to save me from this worse than death torture" (85). The fact that her pain (or "irritation" as she often calls it) seems to be localized in her uterus appears to have only reinforced the opinion of her doctors that hers was a psychological, rather than a physical, illness. Her suffering, of course, was quite real. As Jane reports to her aunts, "no *disease* there [in the womb] the Drs say, but some nervous derangement—Oh what I have suffered my Aunts! What I may still have to suffer!—Pray for me that I may be enabled to endure!" (43).

In her introduction, Jane Roberts does an excellent job of situating Jane's condition within the larger context of Victorian gender expectations and the still pre-scientific state of Victorian medical care. The latter results in her consumption of a variety of drugs, including opium, morphine, camphor, henbane, mercury, and quinine, among others, all with little effect. Roberts also makes a quite interesting assertion concerning the progress of Jane's illness: "What becomes strikingly clear in the story of these eight months," she writes, "is that JWC was cured by nursing rather than by doctoring, and nursing by family, friends, and servants, not by professionals" (xvi). I agree with Roberts's assertion to a point, but I would qualify her statement in two ways. First, I'd say it is the nursing that puts her on the road to *recovery*, rather than effecting a *cure*, since when the volume concludes Jane has not overcome her illness. Through the last month covered by the volume (August 1864), there are indeed signs of improvement: Jane is gaining weight, feeling physically stronger, and exhibiting a generally more hopeful outlook on life. At the same time, though, all is not quite right. In fact, in the very last letter in the volume, dated 31 August 1864, she intimates as much to her husband:

A little better today, Dear; but very nervous, and discouraged! I had got to be too hopeful! More hopeful than there was solid ground for. Yesterday "the Despair" was in my heart again as well as in my face. . . . And tho' I was out of bed *fourteen* times during the night, I got good mouthfuls of sleep between whiles. But I do not feel refreshed by my sleep—but *shaky*, and *low*, and terrified for the return of THE pain. *That* had been quite in abeyance for a fortnight or so, and therefrom

came my new hope and bright spirits. Oh anything but THAT! Last evening again I had to take myself to bed at seven with the intolerable *irritation*. (221)

Second, I would give a little more credit to the efforts of Dr. James Russell, the retired physician and husband of Jane's friend Mary Russell, with whom she has been staying for more than a month when the volume concludes. As Jane herself remarks, "the *Dr* seems to me to have more sense, if not more skill, than any of these fine *Drs*"; moreover, he "does not make light of my *nervousness*—does not say slightly that 'nervous pain does *not kill*'" (149). Perhaps it is this combination of an experienced, sympathetic doctor and the daily attentions of her close friend, Mary Russell—"Mrs Russell is a nurse like my own mother" (149), says Jane—that enables her to regain her strength and begin the journey to a full recovery. Indeed, Roberts appears to qualify her opinion as well, quoting these statements of Jane's and concluding that it may well have been the "peace and quiet, the familiarity of her surroundings, the feeling of being loved and cared for, and of her illness being taken seriously" by the Russells that "all helped effect, if not an actual cure, at least a great improvement in her condition" (xvi).

In addition to its focus on Jane's illness, another important feature of this volume is the significant number of letters that the Carlyles wrote to each other. Of the 242 total letters, just over half are letters sent between Thomas and Jane. This marks a dramatic increase from the previous volume, which featured only seven such letters, despite covering a full year of correspondence (December 1862 through December 1863). The difference is due to the amount of time the Carlyles spent living apart during the first eight months of 1864. In early March, Jane was transported in a "sick carriage" (25–26) to the home of Dr. Peyton and Bessy Blakiston at St. Leonards-on-Sea, near Hastings, moving again at the end of April to a rented home in the same town. Thomas does not join her there until mid-May. Jane then departs St. Leonards in mid-July, without Thomas, eventually settling at Dr. James and Mary Russell's home in Scotland by 23 July, where she remains as the volume concludes. As a result, the letters contain many moving examples of the anxiety and anguish the couple experiences while they are

separated during “this dark and miserable passage of distress” (16), as Thomas calls it. At the same time, while Jane’s illness is certainly a tremendous source of concern for her husband, it is also quite clear that her illness doesn’t quite take precedence over his work on *Frederick*. After briefly visiting Jane at the Blakiston home in early April, Thomas writes to his brother John that “her suffering is, no less evidently, still very great, and filled me with distress to witness it. She is always on the edge of crying: full of hysterical pains and emotions, refuses to have any comfortable hope. My guess is, she will have to stay yonder all summer; there was speculatⁿ thereupon of *my* coming down . . . and I suppose that also to be likely,—if I can possibly contrive to take my *Work* with me; tho’ I absolutely must not otherwise. Oh dear, oh dear! I am hard bested; and do much need all the poor remnant of energy that is left me in this juncture of things” (53). For her part, Jane often defers to the importance of *Frederick*, even when expressing the very depths of her misery and desperation: “Oh my Husband! I am suffering torments! Each day I suffer more horribly[.] Oh I would like you beside me,—I am terribly alone—But I dont want to interrupt your work—I will wait till we are in our own hired house and—then if I am no better you must come for a *day*” (79–80). And, indeed, when Carlyle joins his wife at the St. Leonards rental home in mid-May, he does so with his *Frederick* books and other materials in tow.

One of the great pleasures when reading the *Collected Letters*, of course, is encountering the wealth of information included in the expertly researched annotations. I have always particularly liked the way the editors use the notes to provide us with not only a concise explanation of references and allusions, but also the additional perspectives of family, friends, and acquaintances through excerpts from their letters, diaries, manuscripts, or published materials. In this volume, we hear from a variety of other voices in the notes, including John A. Carlyle, Jean Carlyle Aitken, Mary Carlyle Austin, Henry Larkin, Lady Ashburton, Lady Stanley, Geraldine Jewsbury, John Forster, Lord Stanhope, Joseph Neuberg, John Ruskin, Peyton Blakiston, Rose Greenhow, E. J. Woolsey, Mary Russell, and Dr. James Russell. Many of these names are familiar from previous volumes, of course, but several are new. Among the

most tantalizing of the latter is Rose O'Neal Greenhow, the Confederate spy who was imprisoned for several months in 1862, and who, not long after her release, traveled to Britain and France to drum up support for the Confederacy. Carlyle mentions Greenhow on four occasions, referring to her visits at Cheyne Row and to her correspondence. The inclusion of an excerpt from Greenhow's diary, in which she effuses about Carlyle as "a most noble advocate of the South" and claims he told her "I will do anything for your country" (87), is particularly interesting, especially in light of the disparaging remark Carlyle makes later to Jane: "*item*, that Greenhow, into the fire with *it*. Ask her 'to write to me'? *Neva-a!*" (189). Readers eager for more information on Greenhow and Carlyle, as well as Carlyle's other contacts with advocates of the South, are advised to consult Brent Kinser's insightful book *The American Civil War and the Shaping of British Democracy* (2011).

Elsewhere in the annotations we find one of the most vivid descriptions in the entire volume. It comes from Henry Larkin, who assisted Jane on the day she left Cheyne Row via "sick carriage" to travel to the home of the Blakistons. In their substantial note on this episode, the editors first give us Thomas's account from *Letters and Memorials*, describing Jane being carried down the stairs and then inserted into a specially designed vehicle "which I saw well would remind her, as it did, of a hearse, with its window for letting in the coffin" (26). But it is Larkin's account, wisely included by the editors in full, that gives us the more intense, and chilling, descriptive detail, for it was Larkin who carried Jane down the stairs, "as easily as if she had been a child of twelve years old." Larkin then says he was "literally appalled at the shadow to which she had become reduced," but "was still more shocked at the hideous receptacle to which she was, all unsuspectingly, about to be consigned; far more like a 'hearse,' as Carlyle calls it, than a carriage; in which the living corpse was to be slid feet first, through a small door behind!" (26).

While these other voices may be found within the annotations, Maggie Welsh's letters are part of the regular text, placed on a par with those of Thomas and Jane. The editors have included these ten full letters from Maggie, Jane's cousin, because they are written "on behalf of JWC" (xi) and because

most are from the period when Jane's illness prevented her from writing letters herself. While it is true (except in one instance) that these letters are on behalf of Jane, letting others know how her cousin is feeling and in some cases reproducing her words within quotation marks, the letters are also very much Maggie's, as she includes her own perspective on Jane's condition as well. So what we encounter in these letters is a kind of proxy for Jane's voice, usually in the first part of the letter, followed by Maggie's own voice in the second part, in which she offers an often candid assessment of Jane's progress, or the lack thereof. In a letter to Thomas from late April, for example, Maggie writes that Jane "may appear stronger in actual strength, but indeed the amount of suffering to all *appearances* is as great as ever it has been in all her illness. How she keeps any strength at all I cannot tell, for whatever they may say it is difficult to believe, when one sees her *constantly*, that the suffering is *not* so great to herself as it appears to others. It would be a comfort to think it if I could" (77).

The other elements of the volume—the introduction (as discussed above), the chronology, the biographical notes, the index—are all expertly crafted and extremely useful. The illustrations, too, are for the most part judiciously chosen. However, I see no need for a portrait of William Makepeace Thackeray, who is not even mentioned in any of the letters included in the volume, and whose presence is justified, flimsily, by the fact that Carlyle wrote a letter to his sister Jean on the back of a printed solicitation seeking support for a monument to Thackeray, who died in late December 1863. The other illustrations are of people or objects directly mentioned in the letters. Also included is a reproduction of part of a letter Jane wrote to Thomas in early April; this letter is of great interest, for it shows the marked change in Jane's handwriting due to her illness. In response to this letter, Carlyle laments, "Alas, Darling, I did not know *yr* poor little hand at all" (61). For a previous example of her handwriting, the editors refer us to a reproduction in volume 39; however, I think it would have been better, and certainly more convenient for readers, to include a reproduction of one of Jane's letters from later that same month, specifically the 28 April letter, in response to which Carlyle remarks, "In spite of all my misgivings I have seen nothing Dearest, since you went

away that has given me so much real pleasure as *this first real Letter of yours, in your old hand, and with yr old sharpness of wits & insight into facts abt you*" (83).

But these are small points, and they do not detract from the overall achievement of volume 40. The letters here contain much of interest, including the Carlyles' reaction to the death of Lord Ashburton and Thomas's ongoing struggle with *Frederick*, but the recurring theme throughout, from the first letter to the last, is the conundrum of Jane's illness. It is indeed rewarding to read these often moving and anguished letters in an expertly edited volume that meets the high standards we've come to expect (and appreciate!) from the *Collected Letters*.

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