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The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle. Edited by Ian Campbell, Aileen Christianson, David Sorensen, et al. Volume 37: October 1860–October 1861. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. xxxvii + 302 pp. \$70 [institutions]; \$30 [individuals].

DOROTHY PARKER ONCE QUIPPED “I HATE WRITING, I LOVE having written.” When prolonged by a commitment to complete a mammoth literary endeavor, the stress of the composition process can impose extraordinary demands upon an author’s discipline and lifestyle. One can only wonder how the routines of existence and authorship intermingled with Geoffrey Chaucer as he finished just over a third of his intended one hundred twenty narratives for *The Canterbury Tales*, or with Edmund Spenser as he plowed through six volumes (of the planned twenty-four) of *The Faerie Queen*. Such curiosity underscores what makes the publication of volume 37 of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* so valuable for a critic interested in the daily intersection of life and art of any author. Assembling letters from October 1860 to October 1861, volume 37 documents how Carlyle and his wife both coped with the difficult composition of *Frederick the Great* at the midway point of the project. (Volume 3 was in press while volume 4 was being composed.)

At this stage, Carlyle had come to regard the undertaking as a metaphorical “Influenza” (6) as he testified to his brother John in a 7 October 1860 letter:

About ten days ago I began correcting (for “the seventh and last” time!) the proofs of “Book XI”; and on Friday last, after a great deal of *dash*, fairly dispatched it;—except running over the thing in the form of sheets,

nothing more to do with *it!* That is a real comfort to me; a *10th* part of my deadly task *done*:—courage, let us try (wisely) for the other *nine* tenths: they too, if Heaven permit, shall be got done, one day! (7)

He later conveyed his hope to Ralph Waldo Emerson that *Frederick* would be finished by winter 1862, an estimate that fell short by three years. Throughout 1860 and 1861, Carlyle repeatedly communicated to a variety of correspondents his frustrations with the delays at the printer, the tedious chores of copy editing proofs, and the laborious pace in composing text for volume 4. Not immune to its effects, Jane Welsh Carlyle likewise equated dealing with *Frederick* to suffering an infectious disease, as she confides in this February 1861 letter to a friend: “It was ten days before I got over the effects of that *chill* in the cold damp house—But I am now ‘*about*’ again—only I wish that *Frederick the Great* had never been born! or had died of the measles in his first years!” (109).

What propels the Carlyles through this year is a contrarious admixture of adhering to the routines of life and departing regularly from such routines. For instance, Carlyle’s relief regarding having his horse’s health restored offers evidence of how riding provided a needed diversion: “he will carry his poor owner, at any kind of pace, thro’ the Prussian Adventure, which also bears the name of *Fritz*, or *Frederick*, in the common speech of men” (9). Jane’s worry about a servant problem becomes central to her desire to avoid any disruption to daily regularities. When framed by a manuscript that threatened to imprison them both, however, such routines immersed both husband and wife in “claustrophobic bouts of self-pity” (xiii). At one point, Jane sought relief from this stifling existence through a holiday in Chelsea, only to be prematurely recalled by the demands of both husband and his book. Nevertheless, as David Sorensen summarizes in his excellent introduction, at the center of the relationship was not despair only:

[T]he fruitful aspect of this perversely deadlocked relationship is that it inspires them to seek freedom through the act of writing, the readiest means by which they can gratify their mutual desire to release their imaginative energies from the emotionally cramped surroundings of 5 Cheyne Row. It is the written word

that enables them to channel their frustrations toward constructive purposes. (xiii)

One intriguing dimension reflected in the material assembled in volume 37 resides in the glimmers of parallel inspiration (or perhaps I should say “reinspiration”) provided by contemporary events for the last three volumes of *Frederick*. Having already completed text about the First Silesian War and now in 1861 composing his history of the Second, Carlyle knew he would eventually have to confront the more profound complexities of Frederick’s conduct during the Seven-Years War. I maintain that he subconsciously feared that the tedium of the writing and publication processes might have infected the quality of the prose, especially in his description of battle and command intentions. Thus, his burgeoning interest in the first reports regarding the American Civil War betray not only his rapt attention to world events but also a researcher’s compulsion to understand fully the nuanced intricacies of war itself, insights that would come to inform numerous passages in the last three volumes of *Frederick*. One instance of how the Civil War and Carlyle’s history became juxtaposed in his mind can be seen in these concluding paragraphs to his 17 August 1861 letter to businessman Joseph Neuberger:

I have hardly got 4 sheets of vol IV yet off my hands. Vol iii is fully 100 pages longer than I wished;—Vol IV threatens to be more “impossible” than any part I have yet done: but indeed the whole has been a work of sheer force; spasm after spasm,—and I am sick of *dead-lifts* any farther.

Nothing in military annals equals that of Bull’s Run,—except indeed it were the Taking of Fort Sumter, *whh* ought to be memorable as that of Troy! On the whole, I believe many persons are *abt* opening their eyes to the real *Beschaffenheit* [condition] not of Yankeeland alone, but of England & all lands; and we shall see alterations. (215)

Note how Carlyle immediately counterbalances the dreariness of writing and editing with the stimulation provided by events in the United States. In addition, I find Carlyle’s intent to draw universal insights about war itself from the particulars of American battles to be illuminating. Thus, I wait with great interest for the publication of the next five volumes of

the Carlyle letters so as to see first-hand how this intellectual curiosity played itself out.

Volume 37 of the letters remains true to the excellent editorial standards of the series. Of the 129 letters by Thomas Carlyle and 76 by Jane Welsh Carlyle collected in the volume, 109 are published for the first time. Many of the others had previously been available only as fragments cited in various sorts of earlier publications. As mentioned earlier, Sorensen's introduction is splendidly useful, as are the excellent footnotes, rigorous index, and competent biographical blurbs on the Carlyles' correspondents. But I do have a quibble. While citations to major references fully follow bibliographical standards in the volume's "Key to References" in the front apparatus, several citations of incidental references located in the footnotes throughout the main text unfortunately omit vital information. I can best illuminate the difficulty this editorial choice presents to future scholars by recreating one of my own research hunches that did not pan out.

I am an Americanist by training. Thus, when I came across Jane Carlyle's 29 April 1861 letter to Margaret Oliphant, one phrase struck me as very familiar. In response to Oliphant's request for "details" about clergyman Edward Irving, Jane commented:

It is mildly and modestly that you ask for these "details,"
But nevertheless—the effect produced on my Imagination
is that of—a loaded pistol at my breast and the words
"details or your Life"!! I lose all presence of mind! When
trying to recollect things thus *to order* (as it were); the
blood gets into my head; my heart falls to beating; my
memory becomes blank: It is very absurd! (156)

The editors of the Carlyle letters report that a passage from this letter, which was not specified in the note, was published in Oliphant's 1862 book on Irving. Readers familiar with Emily Dickinson's work may recognize connections between a key image in the letter and her famous poem "My life had stood a loaded gun." There are remarkable thematic and perceptual affinities as well. Many possibilities exist regarding the inspiration for Dickinson's metaphorical linkage of life with a "loaded gun" (such as a passage in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"), but the chance that she may have borrowed it from Jane Carlyle

indirectly through Oliphant's book was an opportunity not to be ignored. Given that Thomas H. Johnson dates the poem's probable composition as 1863 and that Dickinson is known to have read women writers such as Oliphant, I had hopes.

Thus, I embarked on an impromptu research task. The note in volume 37 specified the author's name, the book title, the publication year, but not the place or publisher. To my dismay, I found in libraries and on the Internet a good number of editions published by several houses in America and England, all with an 1862 publishing date and all with differing pagination. Even after an extended perusal of these editions, I could not locate the passage containing a portion of Jane's letter to Oliphant. I then finally contacted Dr. Sorensen, who possessed a copy of the edition that had been the source for the note. He reported that the page number cited for the quotation was in error. Disappointingly, the "loaded pistol" image was not in the fragment used by Oliphant; hence, my speculation disappeared into the black hole of failed scholarly hunches.

I apologize for the length of the above story, but I wanted to illustrate how bibliographical inexactitude in a reference work can transform what should be a five-minute excursion to satisfy curiosity into a protracted wild goose chase. I do not expect Carlyle's editors to clarify the eccentricities of Oliphant publication, but, for the sake of future scholars, I do request that in subsequent volumes every incidental reference source cited in the notes be given the same bibliographical care that is very evident in other sections of the apparatus.

Do not let my above quibble detract anyone from appreciating the overall superior quality of this new addition to the Carlyle letters. The decades of collective devotion to this gargantuan project must tax its editors with sensations not unlike what the Carlyles felt while *Frederick* was still in progress. I sincerely wish that each of them has a "Fritz" to ride in order to find moments of relief from the daily grind of producing excellent and valuable scholarship.