

“*Nero c’est moi*”:
Jane Welsh Carlyle and Her Little Dog

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IF JANE CARLYLE had compiled the Biographical Notes for an edition of her own correspondence, she would undoubtedly have included an extensive one on her dog Nero, who had to be destroyed on the last day of January 1860, when Jane was fifty-eight.¹ He had been her companion for just over ten (extended in Jane’s reckoning, and thus by many commentators, to eleven) years. Nero is too definite a being to have been altogether overlooked by Carlyleans: references to him, and little anecdotes concerning him, are often dropped into biographical texts, but the vital role he played in Jane’s life has not fully emerged, even if the references are frequent (as they are in the Hansons’ *Necessary Evil*, for example), and acknowledge (as the Hansons do) his constant presence while he lived. He does star for a cluster of pages in Thea Holme’s engaging evocation of the Chelsea household, *The Carlyles at Home*, but Nero makes only intermittent, or marginal, appearances in most accounts of the couple’s lives: he was, after all, only a dog. But when he claims his place in the foreground of the marital picture, as he does (if towards the corner) in Robert Scott Tait’s much reproduced portrait of the Carlyles, *A Chelsea Interior* (1858),² we see that he is a figure of some importance—certainly to Jane. Regard for his presence, therefore, helps us towards an understanding of her and of what it was like to be Mrs. Carlyle.

If it is true that whatever goes on in the foreground of a picture can only be fully understood in relation to the whole, it is also conversely true that a detail can be appreciated in its own right (as countless postcards reproducing ancillary dogs, or cats, or other creatures that artists depict in the background or at the edge of paintings, or as portrait enhancements, bear witness); moreover, they can influence the way we regard the entire image. Such is the case with Nero. Nevertheless, his role is often excised

from the Carlyles' story (as indeed his figure is—along with bits of the couple's furniture—in many reproductions of *A Chelsea Interior*), or trimmed, as it is in other reproductions of the painting, including the print by the successful Victorian professional photographer, Leonida Caldesi, and a National Trust postcard.³ There is, for example, only one reference to him in the volume of essays collected in honor of Kenneth J. Fielding under the title *The Carlyles at Home and Abroad*, and then it is made—in passing—by Professor Fielding himself (“Justice” 10); and although (with nineteen months of his lifespan yet to be covered) 146 references to Nero have already accumulated in the indexes to the volumes so far published of the *Collected Letters*, many sometimes quite substantial allusions in the correspondence (including the one cited in my title) have escaped listing.⁴ He is accorded no dedicated entry in Mark Cumming's *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, nor does his name appear in the index. Such omissions, I suggest, indicate the slight importance that seems to be attached to Nero by Carlyle scholars.

The penultimate chapter of Rosemary Ashton's intensive and illuminating study, *Thomas and Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage*, manifestly takes its title, “A Chelsea Interior 1857–1860,” from Tait's painting. Its last sentences succinctly summarize the state of the Carlyles' relationship at this point: “They lived together, but each was increasingly alone. Silent breakfasts, separate dinners, a shortfall of sympathy for each other's mental torment, both strangers to household joys—that was the story which lay behind the couple captured by the meticulous Tait in his *Chelsea Interior*” (415). Balancing as it does the isolation of one against that of the other, this is a fair and moving account of the Carlyles' marriage at the time—but Nero's part in the story is omitted. Furthermore, if the reader is engaged with the paperback rather than the original edition of Ashton's book, Nero—whose image Tait also meticulously captured—is not discernible in the portrait either, for despite Ashton's scrutiny of it, no reproduction of the complete picture is to be found among the volume's forty illustrations. Instead, the central section of the picture (the same section that is reproduced on the cover of the paperback edition of Holme's *Carlyle's at Home*)—showing Thomas standing by the fireplace occupied with his pipe, while Jane sits in a background corner looking diagonally across the room away from him,

apparently focusing on nothing—appears on the cover.⁵

Fielding also interprets this painting as a recreation of the “tense balance of [the Carlyles’] private lives,” although in his commentary Jane comes across as emanating defeat rather than isolation, in spite of Nero’s acknowledged presence as her comforter: “Jane is shown at an intensely unhappy stage of her life, rightly pictured as if she were feeling that there was nothing for her to do but sit in the background, comforted by her pet dog who . . . is by no means an insignificant figure” (“Robert Scott Tait” 115). My concern is to explore the nature and degree of Nero’s significance, the part of Jane’s story that lies behind the strong image of him that Tait prominently depicts just above the bottom right hand corner of the painting he describes on its reverse as: “Picture of the ground floor of No 5 Great Cheyne Row, Chelsea, the residence of Thomas Carlyle, Esq. . . . With portrait of him, his wife, and also of Mrs Carlyle’s little dog, ‘Nero.’”



A Chelsea Interior (1857), by Robert Scott Tait.

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Tait took many photographs of the Carlyles’ house, some of which he used to help him execute *A Chelsea Interior*. He also took, or had already taken, a series of photographs of Jane and Nero together and had taken at least two photographs of Nero alone. Within days of Nero’s death, Jane wrote to Tait in February 1860

to ask if he still possessed “one or even two copies from the little negative of the *Interior* you did for *yourself*—and, if so, to give me them (or it) ‘for love’ or in exchange for two of Caldesi’s large ones!” She wanted to mount one copy of Nero’s “little portrait” in a brooch for her servant Charlotte, who had “all along been extremely good to the dog” (MS: NLS 1808 f. 104), and another in a brooch for herself; but the dog in all of Caldesi’s negatives was, she explained, too large for her purpose. She does not say why none of the other negatives would do (perhaps they were all too large), but—given her earlier attitude to *A Chelsea Interior*—the desire for this particular image for the keepsakes represents a *volte face* on her part. She had found Tait’s repeated and protracted working visits to the house during 1857 extremely irksome and had experienced little admiration for his painstaking method of compiling his study of the room, its objects, and the figures. “[H]e will make his great ‘Work of Art’ last him into 1860, I begin to think!” she commented sardonically to her friend Mary Russell on 19 November 1857:

A whole day painting at my portfolio! Another whole day over my work box and so on! Not the minutest object in these three rooms, opening into one another, but what is getting itself represented with Vandyke fidelity! . . . I suspect he aims at more than posthumous fame from this picture—hopes perhaps—some admirer of Mr C’s with more money than wit to guide it, may give him a thousand pounds for Mr Cs “Interior” the portraits of Mr C himself, and Mr C’s wife, and Mr C’s dog inclusive!—The dog is the only member of the family who has reason to be pleased with his likeness as yet! (*CL* 33: 120–22)

By the time *A Chelsea Interior* was ready for the 1858 Royal Academy exhibition, however, Nero’s likeness had become the most objectionable part of the work, for he had been made to look, according to JWC’s report to the artist Thomas Woolner, “as big as a sheep! *That* is what provokes me; more than being transmitted to ‘Posterity’ in ‘wrong perspective’ and with a ‘frightful table cover!’” (June 1858; qtd. in Woolner 150). As Ashton suggests, Jane is echoing John Ruskin’s criticism of the painting, initially six numbered points elaborated in a letter to

Jane written about the time she was expressing her own views to Mary Russell regarding the slowly progressing work;⁶ yet it is noteworthy that the modifying assurance, "Nero will be delightful" (Cate 78), which Ruskin had appended to his list, and which chimes with Jane's own acknowledgement at the time that Nero had reason to be pleased with his likeness, no longer held sway. Her appeal to Tait less than two years later for the prints from one of his own negatives, though, shows that she had reverted to her initial evaluation of the likeness and authorized its suitability for "Posterity," having no doubt seen that once the image is detached from the composition, the problem of its proportions ceases to exist. Furthermore, while her primary reason for preferring Tait's own prints was probably the one she gave him, it is quite possible that she was also influenced by the fact that in Caldesi's, Nero's image is truncated so that he appears less as a figure than as a sort of bust couchant. Whether or not that was in her mind, former judgments had ceased to matter. Nero was dead, and Tait's portrait of him had become transformed into a cherished icon.

The painting was bought by the Carlyles' friend, Lord Ashburton, for £500—just half the amount Jane imagined Tait hoped for. In March 1866—that is, six years after Nero's death, and a few weeks before her own—it was lent by Lord Ashburton's widow, Louisa, to the Royal Scottish Academy so as to be on display when Carlyle visited Edinburgh to deliver his inaugural speech as Rector of the University on 2 April. Jane's scornful response to a newspaper clipping sent her by Mary Dods, a Haddington acquaintance, puts her own construction on what was going on in the minds of the figures occupying the Chelsea drawing room in Tait's picture. The newspaper's critic was guilty of "an almost unpardonable omission, in failing to point out *the Dog*—'*thinking*'!—thinking, to most purpose of the three, it strikes me! Could anybody look in that dear little quadruped's face; without seeing that *he* was '*thinking*' all this nonsense of keeping him motionless on a sofa-cushion, to be painted, a great bore! And I'll be hanged if either Mr C or I were *thinking* anything more profound!" (12 March 1866, MS: NLS 1797; Ashton 442).

The vehemence with which Jane evokes her own exasperation, and speaks for Carlyle's, while they and Nero were subjecting themselves to Tait's scrutiny, is as telling as the way the

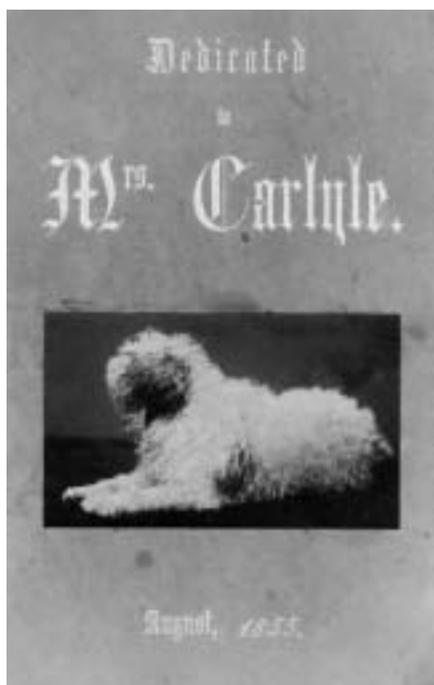
artist presents the figures in relation to each other: memory affects observation. Whereas she had formerly derided Tait for his representation of Nero, she now derides the commentator most of all for failing to recognize what she considers should be obvious to anybody looking into the “dear little” face, but the fact that the viewer sees only Nero’s profile, and that not fully, seems not to occur to her. It is Jane’s remembered self who looks into his face, seeing again what she thinks she saw then as he gazed at her. What her memory cannot be said to have invented or reinvented, though, is her experience of meeting that gaze. In the picture, she certainly looks away from the apparently self-contained and self-occupied Carlyle, but not into the domestic abyss suggested by incomplete reproductions of it. Nor is she merely passively regarding Nero. Of course, the viewer shares neither her perspective nor the perspectives of the other figures; but in his triple portrait, Tait registers and emblemizes the reciprocity between Jane and her dog, and in turn the transmitted sense of their mutual engagement comments on the absence of communication between wife and husband.

Jane’s indignation with the critic in 1866 may not have been intended to be taken altogether seriously, but her evocation of the experience of sitting for the now famous portrait is as poignant as her request in 1860 for posthumous copies of the photographs. Although six years had passed, her recently acquired little pug dog, Tiny—referred to by Carlyle as “Kleino”—who was on her lap when she was found dead in her brougham, had clearly failed to supplant Nero in her affections. Carlyle would testify to her having “little loved it,” recalling that she “had taken it only by charity” (*Reminiscences* 191).⁷ Even in recollection, the sittings continue to comment on the marriage; for though the letter to Mary Dods was written when Jane’s pride in Carlyle was great, Nero somehow predominates.

As Fielding points out, one of Tait’s photographs of Jane precisely matches his portrait of her in *A Chelsea Interior* (“Robert Scott Tait” 114).⁸ However, although the artist certainly worked from this photograph, it is clear from Jane’s correspondence that she also sat for him while he painted. Likewise, the March 1866 letter to Mary Dods indicates that Nero, too, was painted from life as well as from a photograph; but the photograph that aided Tait predates his work on the painting by at least two years, and had

already found a place of honor among Jane's mementos. (Fielding, "Robert Scott Tait" 116n 10).

In 1855 Jane's intimate friend, the novelist Geraldine Jewsbury, instigated the compilation of a photograph album for her. The embossed leather cover identifies it as "TALES OF THE SUN / 1855. / Edited by R. T. [Robert Tait]."⁹ The copy of a photograph of Nero that dominates its frontispiece (see ill.) must surely have been the one Tait used to help him with his painting (although Fielding says that has not survived), for Nero's pose in the two is identical.¹⁰



*Frontispiece to
"Tales of the Sun,"
Jane Carlyle's Photo album*

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*Nero, detail from
A Chelsea Interior*



The year 1855 was a miserable one for Jane. “The eternal east wind has got into every corner of my heart and brain, shrivelling up my faith, hope and charity,” she told her young friend and devotee, Kate Sterling, in early April: “I think seriously of retiring to bed, and abjuring my fellowcreatures—all but Nero—till it turns into the West; I have such difficulty in keeping myself from *flying out* at every body, and telling them considerable portions of my mind!” (*CL* 29: 280).



Kate Sterling

Kate Sterling, who died in 1860, aged 26

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Carlyle’s joyless laboring over his mammoth *Frederick the Great* had made it become “a horrid bore” to her, while the infatuation its author had conceived for Lady Harriet Ashburton (Louisa’s predecessor), and the “slavish homage” (Ashton 271) he paid her, showed no sign of abating. By October she had resorted to confiding in her Journal, which she was to regard as a friend “to comfort me in a time of need—something to hold on to in the darkness and loneliness” (24 March 1855; *CL* 30: 232). But the friend was abandoned on 5 July 1856, her last entry a testimony to her continued wretchedness: “In the evening alone, as usual. A very sick and sad day with me, like many that have gone before

and many that will come after. . . .” Carlyle acknowledged on this page of the manuscript after Jane’s death “A very sad record!” (CL 30: 262n 301).

In between writing the April letter to Kate Sterling and the beginning of her Journal, however, Jane, abetted by Tait, had devised a scheme that lifted her spirits, but for which she needed Thomas’s blessing. On 13 August, he had written to her from Suffolk, where he was the guest of the poet Edward FitzGerald, suggesting that she should join him for a fortnight in Aldeburgh. He gave an enticing description of the little sea town and its surroundings walks, to which he added the encouraging information that “Certain of the female smaller gentry yesterday had lapdogs” (CL 30: 29). But Jane declined the next day, fancying she had herself found what she called “the *Coming cottage*” (CL 30: 30) in Rottingdean, a little village four miles from Brighton Station. So perfectly did the quaint little old (and empty) house seem to answer to both her need and Thomas’s for somewhere to repair to away from London and Frederick that she had almost committed herself to taking it at £12 for the year, justifiably confident that Tait would share both the house and the expense of furnishing it; but she had lost her nerve and decided that she must wait for Thomas’s approval. “But oh what a beautiful sea! blue as the Firth of Forth it was last night!” she wrote yearningly. “I lay on the cliffs in the stillness, and looked at the ‘beautiful Nature’ for an hour and more, which was such a *doing* of the picturesque as I have not been up to for years” (CL 30: 31). Carlyle was not to be lured, however: “The Brighton Cottage has gone to smoke” he was to report to his brother John on 28 August; “by my own movement, that, for Tait and Jane were both very lively about it” (CL 30: 44). “A poor old vacant hut at Rottingdean, which was to be furnished, to be sure!” is how he recalled it after Jane’s death, though he remembered her disappointment too: “Dear soul, what trouble she took, what hopes she had, about that! *Sunt lachrymae rerum*” (CL 30: 30n 1).¹¹

This lonely, unfulfilled hope-quashed period is the immediate context of “Tales of the Sun.” After the dashed cottage fantasy—which was of course a fantasy about shared life, and about having her own desires taken into account—Jane’s spirits plummeted; two months later, in October, she began her despairing Journal, in which she piteously invokes her deceased mother as she

laments that she has had to learn to suffer “‘all to myself.’ From *only childness* to that is a far and a rough road to travel!” (7 November 1855; *CL* 30: 213).

She wrote few letters during this time. Of the 121 collected Carlyle letters written during the second half of 1855, only nine are Jane’s. Nero features in four of them. Indeed, he is the purported, anguished author—jealous of a duck—of one sent to Ellen Twisleton, a young Bostonian woman to whom Jane had become attached, and who was responsible for presenting his mistress with this appropriator of her affections. “Oh Madam; unless *I open my heart* to someone; I shall go mad—and *bite!*” “Nero” writes on 30 November. “For seven years my Mistress and I had been one anothers ‘first object.’¹² . . . And now comes this—*Duck*—this creature without heart or bowels! And off goes my mistress into raptures with her—has no eyes but for *her!* It is *she* who gets shown off to visitors—She who is the new favourite—while I unnoticed unpraised look gloomily on—foaming at the mouth with rage!” (*CL* 30: 127–28). If Jane was aware of an affinity between Nero’s jealousy of the duck and her own of Lady Harriet, for whose “Royal” (Carlyle’s adjective) society and magnanimity she was undoubtedly being neglected, she appears simultaneously to have enjoyed her conceit, allowing self-satire as well as that at Lady Harriet’s expense to diffuse her bitterness. “Wrote a pretty long letter *from Nero* to Mrs Twisleton” (*CL* 30: 227), she noted with satisfaction on 2 December 1855 in her Journal.

Attached to the manuscript of this letter from “Nero” is a photograph of its ostensible author. It is identical to the one used by Jewsbury and Tait for the frontispiece of their Photo Album (see above, 185), showing Nero as he was to appear in *A Chelsea Interior*¹³—proof that this particular image of him, to be replicated in the painting at a slight tilt, to correspond with Jane’s image, was the one most treasured by Jane from the time it was taken in 1855 or earlier, until her imminent death in 1866. She seems to have had less regard for the photographs depicting Nero with her (there are copies of several in the album), though another print of him alone, where he is shown curled up facing the viewer, is displayed as one of a cluster of four portraits (see 211). The other portraits in this group are of her much lamented father and mother, and of herself; so Nero is placed as though he were her own kin.

All this indicates that her dog was indeed Jane’s chief

consolation—that in a way he really was her “first object,” as she claims in his name. She had certainly identified with him for some time, as a statement she had made in August 1852—three years before resorting to her Journal—makes clear. Thomas had written from Scotsbrig, where he was visiting his mother before embarking on a first German tour in quest of *Frederick* material, asking her to be more expansive with the Chelsea news with which she was supplying him. He wanted a detailed report on the progress of the extensive house renovations that were under way and from which he had escaped, for example, and to hear more of her own adventures; while from Nero, he complained, there had not been so much as “a scrape of a pen” (18 August 1852; *CL* 27: 234). Jane complied with a rush of information about absent plasterers, deferred room painting, general chaos, and so forth, indicating that although there was much she could add in the same vein, she had decided that there was no point in giving him “a sensation of nightmare—As to Nero, poor Darling,” she continued, “it is no forgetfulness of him that has kept me silent on his subject—but rather that he is part and parcel of myself; when I say I am well, it means also Nero is well! *Nero c’est moi! Moi cest Nero!*” (20 August 1852; *CL* 27: 239).

After this declaration, Carlyle was treated to a story in which Nero is cast in a less than heroic light, for—like the letter he was to send Ellen Twisleton in November 1855—it is a tale of jealousy. This time its object is also a recent addition to the Cheyne Row household, an unnamed white cat. Unable to tolerate the spectacle of Jane’s polite addresses to the cat, he had ‘snapped and barked’ at his mistress, and had savagely attacked the interloper. Jane dealt with him by boxing his ears, a punishment that he clearly regarded as a betrayal; for, after a moment’s reflection, he rushed up the stairs to the street, and left home. He was quickly found and brought back, but continued to ignore Jane for hours (*CL* 27: 239).

An interesting aspect of this episode is that it is almost a reprise of one that Jane had described to Joseph Neuberg only a few weeks before, when she had taken the new cat onto her lap “to see how he would feel”: “[Nero’s] manifestation of jealousy exceeded my most sanguine expectations—he retired under the sofa and neither coaxing nor cake could persuade him out; to all my blandishments he answered with an angry growl, and when I

put in my hand to pull him out he retired further in, and went thro the form of *snapping* at it—and this mood held out for an hour or two after I had sent the cat from the room” (16 July 1852; *CL* 27: 170). Jane seems not only to have enjoyed describing Nero’s resentment, but also to have been unable to resist provoking it. Whether she did or not, what is clear is that she is not making it up, but reporting on what she has actually witnessed, as she is, though more whimsically, in Nero’s letter to Ellen Twisleton: Nero’s spells of possessive suffering reflect, rather than project, her own.

It is clearly in recognition of Nero’s status in Jane’s life that Geraldine Jewsbury and Robert Tait, both frequent and observant visitors to Cheyne Row (Geraldine had moved from Manchester to Oakley Street, two minutes’ walk away, in 1854) gave his



Jane and Geraldine, by Tait, April 1855

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image—the image that Tait was to re-memorialize in his painting—pride of place in the album they dedicated to her.¹⁴

But by no means do all of the pictures in this album belong to 1855 or before. Several, including photographic portraits of Tait himself, Erasmus Darwin, and Jane's cousin Maggie Welsh, were taken in 1856; and others, among them a bearded Carlyle, and interiors and exteriors of the Carlyles' house, were taken in July 1857, when Tait, preparing his ground for *A Chelsea Interior*, took his "malodorous Photographing Apparatus" to the house "getting views wh^h will certainly 'please Mrs Carlyle'" (*CL* 32: 205), who had impulsively taken herself to Scotland for a round of visits. Again, as she told Mary Russell, feeling "very *sick* and weak and miserable" (5 July 1857; *CL* 32: 170), she had conceived a sudden and especial longing to go to Sunny Bank, at Haddington, her birthplace, where she was sure to be welcomed by the elderly Donaldson sisters, Jean and Jess: they had been her mother's friends, they had known her all her life (Jean was her godmother), and, she told Thomas, they loved her "so very much." Their happiness in her society boosted her morale immeasurably, and she went to bed every night "as hoarse as a crow with talking and reading at the top of my lungs to these dear almost stone-deaf old women—and I *like that!*" (12 July 1857; *CL* 32: 180). While she was away "dear little Nero" wrote to her occasionally, this time with the faithful "Geraldine Jewsbury *holding his paw!*" (JWC to Lady Airlie, 31 July 1857; *CL* 32: 212).

When Jane returned to Chelsea in September her health had improved; but, although she and Thomas had written frequently and affectionately to each other while she was away (with Thomas now bereft of Lady Harriet, who had died in May, doing his best to satisfy Jane's need for reports on Nero's behavior and on the wellbeing of her other, lesser comforters, her canaries and plants), she came back to a husband whose attention was again entirely given over to the burdensome *Frederick the Great* (this time to the proofs of the first two of ultimately six volumes) and to a house at the daily disposal of Robert Tait, the effect of whose omnipresence is undoubtedly part of the story behind his painting. All the same, some of the photographs Tait had taken in July during her absence were added to her album. Copies of these 1857 images have been severally reproduced, but viewed as an

entity, it is “Tales of the Sun”—with Nero its presiding image—that effectively constitutes a visual, if incomplete, record of Jane’s world in the years 1854–57.

Fielding and David R. Sorensen claim that Jane consoled herself for her childlessness “by supposing that she was Thomas’s intellectual companion” (xiii). But it was arguably the absence of physicality (with or without sex) for which Jane most needed consolation. As many of her letters indicate, she was physically demonstrative, needing the comfort of the kind of tactile, bodily proximity that she seems to have experienced—even if moderately—in her early married life. That there was this sort of contact between husband and wife for a period is borne out by a letter Jane sent to Thomas in the sixth year of their marriage. Exhausted after a rough sea journey, she wrote from her maternal uncle John Welsh’s house in Liverpool on 31 September 1831: “*Sleep* which is my great want is precisely the thing which cannot be had in this house by any means—I could sleep sounder in the open street. . . . O my love my love in your arms I shall feel so safe so blessed after all this tossing and tumbling and fretting and raging” (CL 5: 447).

Seven weeks earlier (6 August), after Thomas had departed for London leaving her in the isolated Craigenputtoch farmhouse they had inhabited for more than three years, she had told him that waking from a troubled sleep on the first morning of his absence she “fell a-crying anew” when she saw his red nightcap lying on her pillow, “and actually kissed it I believe” (CL 5: 312). She was further distressed when she arose and saw his personal things scattered throughout the bedroom—the room that was to stir Carlyle’s own emotions when he revisited the house in 1846.¹⁵ So, although Jane may have found life bleak and unfulfilling on that “little estate of *peat bog*” (CL 32: 71), as she described Craigenputtoch to Mary Smith on 11 January 1857, she and her dyspeptic, work obsessed husband clearly shared a bed and at least an everyday sort of physical intimacy. The need for separate bedrooms created by Thomas’s well documented insomniac antics and Jane’s own, equally well documented night watching aside, there is little evidence that this kind of mutual familiarity continued after they became installed in Cheyne Row. However suspect some elements of Geraldine Jewsbury’s account to Froude of the marriage may

be,¹⁶ her emphasis on its caresslessness only endorses the impression created by the Carlyles' own correspondence.

In so far as it was possible, Nero supplied while he lived the animated physical presence, bodily warmth, expressive devotion—and bed-fellowship—that she craved, and that she celebrated in many letters. To Louisa, Lady Ashburton, Jane professed that she lacked towards any “human child” (even the adjective indicates that, as far as she was concerned, there were other kinds of children) “what is called ‘*the maternal instinct*’” that is until it was awakened by the birth of a daughter to Louisa, (July 1860; Hansons 488); five months after Nero’s death, she acknowledged to Blanche, Lady Airlie, during Louisa’s pregnancy, that her “poor little dog,” who was suffering from the slowly terminal effects of having had his throat run over by a butcher’s cart, was “*my substitute for a little bundle of flannel.*” She had in fact already gone so far as to make the now desperately wheezing, breathless creature “a little warm coat, which gives him the looking of an enchanted human being!” (28 November or 5 December 1859; Fielding and Sorensen 244–45).

But if Nero was Jane’s alternative child as well as companion, he also embodied an almost sacred connection with the past through his association in her mind with Shandy, the Blenheim cocker spaniel who featured in some of her pre-marriage letters, and whose image was commemorated on one of her seals.

She revealed her pleasure in Shandy’s animated, companionable presence much as she was to express her delight in Nero more than a quarter of a century later, for example describing



Jane Welsh's "Shandy" Seal; From Ritchie, opp. 119.

with already characteristic panache his response to the overtures of her paternal uncle Robert Welsh's "big, bouncing, brute of a Dog," Dargo. Uncle ("in a shooting dress") and aunt (in "furs and feathers") had burst through the door just as she was looking forward to emotional indulgence in the last scene of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, Jane told her Edinburgh friend Eliza Stodart. Uncle and aunt were preceded by Dargo

prancing, capering, and overthrowing, with all the boldness and impudence to be expected in a Town-dog on a visit to *friends in the country*— However, to do Dargo justice, he seems the most kindly disposed of the three; for he no sooner descried Shandy, than he made straight up to him, and commenced kissing and caressing him with great good will. Shandy, unacquainted with town manners, approved not of such freedoms; nor was he slow in showing his resentment, for that *brief* morsel, like the offspring of the bass-fiddle, has a bigger soul than his size entitles him to—his eyes lightened—his back bristled, like a very cat's—and he poured forth such a volley of indignation, that the canine Goliath quite astounded by his eloquence made a rapid retreat, with his tail between his legs— This hubbub deserves the notice I have taken of it; for it was the only moment of excitement I experienced during their stay. (*CL* 2: 277–78)

As Jane's suitor, Thomas knew and told her that Shandy must be acknowledged, "*(qui vivat valeatque!)*" (16 July 1821; *CL* 1: 370), so he remembered to send his respects to him—rather as he was to send respects to Nero, and to Sambo, Lady Harriet's dog; he even finds him useful for underscoring a maxim in a letter to Jane: "Happiness is not our final aim in this world—or poor Shandy would be the finest character in the nation" (1 September 1821; *CL* 1: 368). But his most animated reference to him by far is the elaborated anecdote "furnished by a correspondent of our own" (surely Jane) he reported as a footnote to his January 1838 review of John Gibson Lockhart's reverent *Life* of his father-in-law, Sir Walter Scott, towards whom Shandy—allowed in retrospect to have been "one of the smallest, beautifullest, and wisest of lap-dogs, or dogs" ("Memoirs" 331n)—behaved in an extraordinary manner when he was taken on a visit to Edinburgh. Although he

usually shrank from strangers and had never been introduced to Sir Walter, he would run ecstatically towards him on each of the several times he met him on Princes Street, and frisk and fawn and lick the author's feet. "Had Shandy been the most extensive reader of Reviews, he could not have done better," Carlyle recalled ("Memoirs" 331–32).



*Portrait of Shandy, reproduced from David Davidson,
Memoirs of a Long Life 331*

For her part, the young Jane Baillie Welsh had once reinforced her admiration for Thomas by telling him that she "would give Shandy and my pearl necklace" to be able to write such a story as his "Cruthers and Jonson" (18 January 1823; *CL* 2: 264), in which the heroine bears a striking resemblance to herself. Her sacrificial gesture may have been safely figurative, but it is difficult to imagine the middle aged Jane Welsh Carlyle similarly trading Nero for the ability to write another *Frederick the Great*, in spite of the admiration she duly expressed for the first two volumes (she did not read the others).¹⁷

While Jane obviously loved and enjoyed Shandy, in his time she was the admired and sought after belle of Haddington; he was never needed as Nero, her companion in future suffering, was to be needed. One of Jane's suitors in those Haddington days had been the sculptor and politician George Rennie, who was to serve as Governor of the Falkland Islands from 1847 to 1855. On 25

April 1856, Jane's misery was suddenly alleviated by a visit from Rennie, whom she had not seen for ten years. She sprang into his arms "and kissed him a great many times! Oh it has done me so much good this meeting!" she told her Journal: "My bright, whole-hearted, impulsive youth seemed conjured back by *his* hearty embrace. . . . I am a different woman this evening! I am *well!* I am in an atmosphere of *home* and *long ago!* George spoke to me of *Shandy* while he caressed *Nero!*" (CL 30: 247). Jane's direct association of one dog with the other as the past infuses the present gives Nero a place in that conjured *long ago*, when she shared Shandy with her mother, and when she was "made much of." The remembered world is of course irrecoverable: the euphoria generated by Rennie's visit is overtaken by disappointment and renewed despair, and by the sense of being subjected by her husband to "unjust treatment, harshness and disdain" (Journal, 11 November 1855; CL 30: 214). But Nero's honorary membership of that lost home life accounts for the placing of his



Stauros Dilberoglou, who presented Nero to Jane, December 1849

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portrait with the family group on her Chelsea bedroom wall and endorses its inclusion in "Tales of the Sun."

It was to the perceptive Geraldine Jewsbury, the instigator of the album, that Jane owed her first debt of gratitude for Nero, for it was through Geraldine that she met Stauros Dilberoglou, the young Greek merchant who in early December 1849 had sent him to her from Manchester after he had heard her talking about her wish for a dog.

Her almost disbelieving excitement at the arrival of this "perfectly beautiful and *queer* looking" little dog, described by Carlyle as "Cuban (Maltese? and otherwise mongrel)" (11 December

1849; *CL* 24: 309n), and her relief at Thomas's amused and amiable reception of him, are palpable. From the outset, he slept at the foot of her bed without disturbing her, followed her like a shadow, lay in her lap, and generally consoled her: "for it *is* really a comfort to have something alive and cheery and fond of me always there," she told Carlyle's brother John (10 December 1849; *CL* 24: 308). Three months later, she was to use almost the same words to her cousin Jeannie Welsh, though by then Nero had been promoted to "chief comforter" of her life (4 March 1850; *CL* 25: 37). Furthermore, he was not importunate; he neither barked nor whined, and he had the perspicacity to appear infatuated with Carlyle. The "little beast" could charm him out of his ill humour by "danc[ing] round him on its hind legs, till he *comes to* and feels quite grateful for its confidence in his good-will . . . [and] gives it *rasens* . . . and calls it 'you little villain' in a tone of great kindness," she reported to her old nurse, Betty Braid, after confessing that she found Nero "almost as engaging as *Shandy*—tho' no *new* dog can ever *replace* dear little *Shandy* in my affections" (31 December 1849; *CL* 24: 316–17).

But these were early days. It was not long (late January 1850) before Jane was describing to her brother-in-law John her first experience "of the strange, suddenly-struck-solitary, altogether ruined feeling of having lost one's dog!" (*CL* 25: 17). She had almost immediately spotted him in the arms of a dog stealer, but only a month later she was recounting another such incident: "The great delight of my life . . . was stolen for a whole day but escaped back to me on its own four legs," she told Mary Russell. "Mr C" had asked while Nero was still missing what she would give the dog thieves for returning him to her. "I answered passionately with a flood of tears 'my whole half-years allowance'!—so you may fancy the fine way I am in!" (27 February 1850; *CL* 25: 35). There were to be many more such catastrophes.¹⁸ To Thomas's sister, Jean Carlyle Aitken, she declared that she was "no longer alone any more than you are with your bairns—tho' the company is different," and scored a point by adding "mine has *one* advantage however, it needs no *sewing for*" (10 March? 1850; *CL* 25: 46). Soon after, Jane decided it would be prudent to leave Nero behind when she was required to visit the apparently ailing Lady Harriet at one of her country houses, Addiscombe in Surrey. Under cover of the mock love letter she addressed to Nero—her

“poor orphan,” her “dear good little dog!”—Jane allowed herself to vent a little sarcasm, telling him that “The Lady for whom I abandoned you, to whom all family-ties yield, is pretty well again so far as I see.” She acknowledged Lady Harriet’s kindness, but clearly felt more kinship with her “Darling,” whose “affectionate caresses” she looked forward to, than with her hostess. “Kiss your Father for me,” she closed, thus insisting on Carlyle’s membership in her family. “Ever your loving / Agrippina” (20 March 1850; *CL* 25: 52–53). “Agrippina” was the name Lady Harriet had conferred on her as Nero’s “mother.” It is not quite clear what role had been envisioned for Carlyle, but since the Roman Nero had organized his mother’s murder, the question arises of what was lurking in her Ladyship’s mind.¹⁹

While Jane’s reliance on Nero—for companionship, solace, and perhaps most important a sense of connectedness to life and liveliness—continued to grow and intensify, Thomas’s own attitude to him reflected something of his attitude towards Jane, which in turn contrasted markedly with his worshipful stance towards Lady Harriet, whom he called in a letter to her, a “most miraculous being” (13 September 1851; *CL* 26: 172). His no doubt affectionate habit of addressing Jane as “dear little Goody,” “wifey,” “poor little soul,” and so forth, imparts a patronizing quality to many of his letters, whether he is expressing approval, gratitude, concern, or sorrowful reproach. Although a quadruped can hardly be patronized, Carlyle’s allusions and messages to “poor Nero,” the “wretch” or “poor wretch,” “little vermin,” “wretched messin” (14 December 1850; *CL* 25: 307), “wretched little *messin-dog*” (22 April 1853; *CL* 28: 118), though usually kindly and fond appellations, emphasize the dog’s comparative inconsequentiality—rather as his mode of addressing his wife upholds the marital hierarchy.

The use of *messin* (or *messian*, Scots for pet dog or lap dog, mongrel or cur), itself perfectly indicates the ambivalence of Carlyle’s attitude toward Nero. The little dog accompanied him on his Chelsea night walks, gave him ecstatic welcome, and often entertained him and lifted his spirits, but he also found Nero, he told his brother John, “rather troublesome to the philosophic mind, and *dirty* if not often washed” (18 April 1851; *CL* 26: 61). When he tried Carlyle’s forbearance, as was frequently the case, the master regarded him as a nuisance best dispensed with.

During one of Nero's many disappearances, for instance, Carlyle was able to express pity for his "poor Dame" while "quietly" and treacherously confessing to his sister Jean, "for my own part, I think it will be almost as well, if this little wretch (very dirty, and bothersome about the house, tho' a cheerful little object too), should never come back!" (23 January 1851; *CL* 26: 24). When six months later Nero was stolen yet again, Carlyle's "own decided counsel," as he told his mother this time, was "to *give him away* to some good hands;—but he seems to afford so much amusement here, and is so immensely 'loved,' I cannot insist on that view of the case just yet" (11 June 1851; *CL* 26: 88).

The quotation marks around "loved" have the effect of keeping Carlyle aloof from the word, and of diminishing the value of what his wife felt for Nero, so that the possibility of eventually handing the dog over to someone else can be allowed to hover. It is true that on this occasion Jane herself wondered whether she should refuse to pay for Nero's return, fearing that if the thieves found her ready to pay any money to get him back ("as I am," she self-contradictorily admitted to her cousin Helen Welsh), they would keep stealing him. The only other solution she could think of would be to keep him on a chain when they went out, "and that is so sad a Life for the poor dog— What his life is today I am afraid to conjecture!" (5 June 1851; *CL* 26: 84). But Geraldine—to whom Jane must have written in the same vein—knew Jane better than she knew herself and would have none of it: "Poor little Nero. But you are surely not going to lose heart about him, and leave him in the lion's den because he may again be stolen," she wrote incredulously. "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' . . . Nero must be got back: he was the only thing that did not torment you; he was a comfort, and must not be let go. . . . No! Nero must be got back, even at the risk of having his future liberty curtailed; he must henceforth walk on a string" (6 June 1851; Ireland 403). As someone who admitted that her heart would nearly break if anything happened to her own dog, Kennet, she knew she was right to be so absolute about Nero's role.

Jane sometimes used Nero as her surrogate in attempts to communicate with Carlyle, but she clearly also wanted simply to endear the dog to him—not just by writing engaging accounts of his tricks and gratifications and relations with other animals, but

by sending messages from him. Nero typically sent his “dear little love” (5 September 1851; *CL* 26: 152) or “kind love” (25 August 1852; *CL* 27: 252); however, until Lady Harriet’s demise, Carlyle continued mainly to send the more restrained “regards,” or “respects” (sometimes extended to whichever cat happened to be in residence) along with instructions for him to be given a raisin, a morsel of sugar, or a drop of tea. He did relish Jane’s domestic animal stories, though, and would sometimes let rays of Nero’s “obscure joys” (4 September 1850; *CL* 25: 191) into his own letters; and once, in July 1853, he had an extraordinary vision of him when Jane was visiting his brother John, a doctor, at Moffat, in the Scottish borders. With shaking hand, she had written describing in vertiginous, breathless detail the climb she had undertaken—alone, except for the frightened Nero—the day before, when she had wanted to get closer than the customary viewpoint to Grey Mare’s Tail, a spectacular waterfall. She had achieved her objective and was standing in front of the cataract—with Nero courageously thrusting his head out from under her skirts in order to bark furiously at it—when she saw John

waving his hat to me from the top of the hill—and *excited* by the grandeur of the scene I quite forgot how old I was and how out of the practice of “speeling rocks,” and quite forgot too that John had made me take the night before a double doze of morphia which was still in my head making it very light—and I began to climb up the precipice!!—for a little way I got on well enough but when I discovered that I was climbing *up a ridge* (!)—that the precipice was not only behind but on *both sides* of me— I grew, for the first time in my life that I remember of, frightened—*physically frightened*— I was not only afraid of falling down—but of losing my head to the extent of *throwing* myself down—to go back on my hands and knees as I had come up was impossible—my only chance was to look at grass under my face and toil on till John should see me— I tried to call him but my tongue stuck fast and dry to the roof of my mouth— Nero barking with terror and keeping close to my head still further confused me— John had meanwhile been descending the hill; and holding by the grass. (8 July 1853; *CL* 28: 188–89)

Jane went on to emphasize John's kindness as he directed her terrified descent, encouraging her all the way and saving her from the panic induced folly of entrusting herself to a torrent-bed instead of the grass. So horrific had been her experience, however, that her face had become purple, and black spots had appeared under her eyes. She trembled still, and Carlyle trembled as he read her account, trying without success to picture the exact scene of her peril, though he knew a shepherd had recently been killed in the region.²⁰ He reproached her for her "mad pranks," and thanked God and John for her deliverance; but it was "Nero, poor wretch of a Nero" who had come into his head in the night as he lay between sleeping and waking: "the white barking glance of him, across the hollow-night of my imagination; and [I thought] how he too would soon vanish, and his love of *bones* and of us be alike abolished in the black immensities: I started broad awake, and was heartily *wae* for even the poor dog, not to speak of human souls, dear to me, and strangers to me, all subject to the great Doom." While Nero's image is the harbinger of Carlyle's intimations of mortality, it also inspires him, not perhaps in his mind's journey from Doom to Hope and the "broken bits of rainbow hang[ing] aloft over the immeasurable deluge and its mountain waves" (9 July 1853; *CL* 28: 194), but in his unselfconsciously poetic conjuring of the vital, barking manifestation itself, and its immediate effect. Nero flashes into his mind *in propria persona*, of course, but he is also Jane's fellow adventurer and ambassador, and the movement of Carlyle's thoughts towards woeful recognition of the dog's love of them both acknowledges, in its way, the bond between him and his wife.

During this period of Jane's absence, Carlyle's subsequent references to Nero revert to the kindly / whimsical, and are mainly to do with offers "to divide with Nero what *tewheets* [lapwings] he has caught" (*CL* 28: 208), knowing he will never catch any.²¹ It is only when Jane is dead that, in a note to one of her letters, he allows himself to give full rein to praise of her dog, although sentiment is still not allowed to obscure flaws: Thomas both and then credits Nero for having been "most affectionate [and] lively" and asserts that he was "otherwise of small merit, and little or no training." Similarly, if he was "so loyal, so loving, so *naïve* and true," it was "with what of dim intellect he had!" But in

this same note—in effect a fifty line biography of Nero, in which Carlyle’s own “humble partnership” with the dog, formed when they swam together in the North Sea in the last year of Nero’s life, is given prominence—Carlyle tells the story of how he one day “came pattering upstairs to my garret; scratched duly, was let in, and brought me (literally) the *Gift of a HORSE* (which I had talked of needing)! Brought me, to wit, a letter hung to his neck, inclosing on a saddler’s card the picture of a horse, and adjoined to it her cheque for 50*l.*—full half of some poor legacy which had fallen to her! Can I ever forget such a thing?” (*CL* 24: 309–10n). Carlyle could not accept Jane’s money, but in 1857 she reported to Mary Austin that he did buy a horse, Fritz (named of course after Frederick the Great), “a quite remarkable *combination of courage and sensibility*” (2 January; *CL* 32: 69), which he rode regularly for about ten years.

In conveying Jane’s generous offer to Carlyle, Nero was not only the messenger, but also a message, the burden of which was “Love the bearer, love me.” Carlyle’s sighing recollection of the occasion indicates that the strategy was not without effect, though at the time it made no difference to the tenor of his communiqués—infidelities, of a sort—to Lady Harriet. There can be no doubting the sincerity of the declaration he made to his “poor Jeannie” in August 1852 that she was his “best and now one of my oldest Loved Ones” (*CL* 27: 238), but he was unable to confront the incremental reasons for her resentment of her Ladyship, continuing even in *Reminiscences* to pass over his infatuation, though recording in another note to one of his dead wife’s letters his pride in “the constant regard” of this “most queen-like woman.” “In no society, English or other, had I seen the equal or the second of this great lady,” he proclaims; “by nature and by culture *facile princeps* she, I think, of all great ladies I have ever seen” (*CL* 32: 175n 8). So it is hardly surprising that he failed to understand that Jane’s attachment to Nero significantly reflected on his fascination for this woman. This, too, is unsurprising, since (unlike Jane) he characteristically failed to realize how fond he himself was of Nero until the day he was put down: “I could not have believed my grief then and since would have been the twentieth part of what it was—nay, that the want of him would have been to me other than riddance,” he confessed. “Our last midnight-walk together (for he insisted on trying to come) . . . is

still painful to my thought. ‘Little dim-white speck, of Life, of Love, Fidelity and Feeling, girdled by the Darkness as of Night Eternal!’” (CL 24: 310n). Despite this heartfelt epitaph, the failure of perception implicit in the confession preceding it extends to his recollection of Jane’s manner of grieving: “*Her* tears were passionate and bitter,” he remembered, “but repressed themselves as was fit, I think the first day” (CL 24: 310n). That self-revealing “as was fit” denotes the limitations of Carlyle’s empathetic capacity. It may be that the “downright human *tears*” he had himself shed, and for which Jane had gratefully told Louisa she “liked him . . . more than for all the philosophy that ever came out of his head” (12 February 1860; Fielding and Sorensen 249), illuminate his gentler qualities, but as Jane sardonically noted, his recovery from them was swift, and it caused her simply to express her continuing grief in a series of letters to others instead of to him. She soon made it clear to Tait, for example, that she no longer considered Carlyle’s fellow feeling to be depended on: “my sorrow over [Nero] is my own affair,” she wrote when asking for the photographic prints, “incomprehensible, of course, to anyone besides myself—and perhaps good little Charlotte who has gone about with red eyes ever since” (February 1860; Fielding and Sorensen 249). However, in a letter—essentially Nero’s obituary—that she wrote late in the month to Mary Russell, she charts the rapid diminution of her servant’s sorrow, as well as her husband’s:

I have lost my dear little companion of eleven years’ standing: my little Nero is dead! And the grief his death has caused me has been wonderful even to myself. His patience and gentleness, and loving struggle to do all his bits of duties under his painful illness, up to the last hour of his life, was very strange and touching to see, and had so endeared him to everybody in the house, that I was happily spared all reproaches for wasting so much feeling on a dog. Mr. C. couldn’t have reproached me, for he himself was in tears at the poor little thing’s end! And his heart was (as he phrased it) “unexpectedly and distractedly torn to pieces with it!” As for Charlotte, she went about for three days after with her face all swollen and red with weeping. But on the fourth day she got back her good looks and gay spirits; and much sooner, Mr. C. had got to speak of

“poor Nero,” composedly enough. Only to *me*, whom he belonged to and whom he preferred to all living, does my dear wee dog remain a constantly recurring blank, and a thought of strange sadness! . . . I grieve for him as if he had been my little human child. (A. Carlyle, *NLM* 2: 223–24)



Jane and Nero, by Tait, 1855

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Jane’s grief for Nero was naturally bound to be more extended than Thomas’s. It is the discrepancy between his observations concerning her behavior and what she continued actually to feel that is the measure of their marital disunity: it accords with the difference between his attitude to her bouts of emotional wretchedness during their marriage and his stance towards her after her death, when she became his “queen” and his “darling.” Even in retrospect, he was not able to perceive that Jane had lost not just an engaging pet, but a replacement for what she lacked in her relations with him; for, as Geraldine appears to have

understood, for much of the time she had lived on terms of greater equality and intimacy with her dog than she had with her husband.

If cheerfulness cannot be said to have been one of Jane's chief characteristics, a poignant eagerness for life was. This innate zest is expressed in the stories with which her letters abound. Carlyle did not have that in him which would have enabled him to enter into the spirit of the climb to Grey Mare's Tail, nor would he have made an ideal companion on the cliffs (let alone in the cottage) at Rottingdean; better that she should communicate her exhilaration or her joy to him in a letter than to hope for his direct participation, just as overseeing domestic upheaval and dispatching descriptive bulletins on her own authority was preferable to coping with his intolerant presence. As many Carlyleans have noted, it was chiefly by satisfying a mutual need when apart to maintain an almost daily correspondence that the Carlyles sustained their relationship.

Two eagerly anticipated letters that Jane wrote to Thomas at the beginning of August 1852, about two weeks before Nero disgraced himself with the white cat and after she had traveled to Sherborne in Dorset to see her dying friend Catherine Macready (the wife of the great actor-manager), were of the most marriage rewarding kind. These letters, which describe her enroute experiences and, briefly, the visit itself, are discussed by Aileen Christianson in an essay on Jane's travel narratives. Focusing on the stage in the outward bound journey when Jane "felt as if I were *reading about myself in a Miss Austin novel*," and how she and a gentleman—who had galloped after her hired gig in order to hand her the parasol she had left on the coach from which she had transferred—had exchanged bows "like first cousins of Sir Charles Grandison" (*CL* 27: 208–09), Christianson demonstrates that Jane's allusions to Richardson, Austen, and other authors "provide a fine illustration of the intersection between fiction and nonfiction in her writing, with fiction impinging on her actual travel in a literal sense" (216). Although this claim is illuminating, an earlier passage in Jane's letter indicates her awareness that, conversely, fiction can evolve from experience: a brilliant little self-contained reconstruction of her encounter with a sympathetically idiosyncratic vegetable grower concludes, "He would have been worth a hundred pounds to Dickens that man!" (*CL* 27: 207). What this story within a story exemplifies above all is Jane's

habit of *recounting*, of knowingly making vivid to her expectant reader (now readers), as well as to her listeners, the events of her daily life, wherever they have chanced to occur.

The circumstances of these particular experiences happen to have been a journey. However, the impression created by the extracts chosen by Christianson is that Jane was traveling alone. But she was not; she was with Nero, a fact which made all the difference to her sense of herself as a traveler, as is evident from her description of setting off from Paddington Station “with my night things in a bag on one arm, and my ‘Blessed’ in a basket on the other. HE gave me no trouble—kept himself hidden and motionless till the train started, and then looked out cautiously, as much as to say ‘are we safe?’” Arriving at Frome Station (a mile from Frome itself) at the end of the first stage of the journey, she deposited her bag and, with Nero set “quite free,” walked with him “as calmly and naturally as if we had known where we were going” into town for some refreshment. At “*The George*” inn, she was served some fly-blown cold lamb so unappetising that “even Nero disdained to touch it!” before the pair walked back to the station to wait for the Yeovil coach—the coach on which she was to leave her parasol—which would drop them eight miles from Sherborne, where she “hoped to find a fly—‘or something’!” (CL 27: 206).

What this first part of Jane’s letter conveys is the sense of an adventure she has consciously shared: the shift in her story from the plural pronoun to the singular occurs only after Nero’s companionable presence is well established. He is emphatically no mere personality denied appendage or costume accessory, but a comrade. And so he attended Jane on many train journeys, frequently featuring in her vivid accounts of them just as he features in the letters centering on her Chelsea life. At the beginning of September 1851, for example, a month after he had been, in Thomas’s words, “*smuggled* . . . in a dextrous manner in spite of railway guards” (CL 26: 117) to accompany the Carlyles to Malvern where Thomas was to take the water cure, Jane again triumphantly smuggled him onto a train when she set out on a visit to Geraldine, still living in Manchester: “At the Manchester Station a porter held out his hands for the basket in which I had him, that I might descend more conveniently; but I said with wonderful calm— ‘Thank you— I have something here that I

require to be careful of— I will keep it myself— And the man bowed and went for my other luggage” (*CL* 26: 153). Nero made other railway journeys during this Manchester visit, always “smuggled,” a word that enhances the sense of adventure and that Jane clearly took great delight in applying. In May 1853 he was taken to Headly, near Reigate, to visit Kate Sterling and her sister, and in July he accompanied his mistress on the staged journey to Scotland that was to result in their terrifying experience on the “precipice.” This time Nero’s fare was paid for, though Jane “rather grudged the 4/—” after no one demanded his ticket, but she proudly reported that “the instant the door was opened at Liverpool Nero leapt out, tho’ he had never stirred at any other stopping—The sense of that Dog!!” (*CL* 28: 183).

Jane had left the train at Liverpool in order to visit her dear, now elderly, uncle, John Welsh, and his poor misshapen daughter, Helen. Jane was moved to tears when she beheld him, on whom age and infirmity seemed to have conferred extraordinary beauty and contentment and who looked at her with great benevolence. On her way back from Scotland at the end of July, she went to see her uncle and cousin again. She had cried “all the way to Carlisle” after leaving her “poor old Country,” where her last, and painful, visit had been made to Scotsbrig to see Carlyle’s aged mother, who lived with his brother Jamie and sister-in-law Isabella. Other siblings were in attendance, and for some reason Jane had felt forced to leave before the appointed day; so the warm welcome she received from her own kin at their house in Maryland Street must have been balm. Her uncle was “especially pleased” to see her, but the little vignette she sketches of her arrival at the house is of two figures: the frail old man, and her dog: “Nero ran up to him alone in the Drawing room as if to tell we were come. And when I went in was standing at his knees my uncles hand on his head as if receiving his blessing” (*CL* 28: 221). This image, which suggests confirmation of Nero’s acceptance into the Welsh family fold by its spiritual head, is to acquire an iconic glow; for eleven weeks later, Jane’s uncle would be dead. Little knowing that her cousin Helen would also be dead before the end of the year, Jane wrote to offer deep sympathy to her and to cousin Maggie in their bereavement, adding that it was a “sad change” for her, too: “little as I saw of him, to know that kind good Uncle was in the world for me—to care about me however long absent—as nobody but one

of ones own blood can—was a sweetness in my lonely life which can be ill spared” (12 October 1853; *CL* 28: 287). Carlyle told his sister Jean of Jane’s silent sadness as she sat “making up mournings,” noting that her uncle had been “the last of all her kindred too, in some measure” (12 October 1853; *CL* 28: 286), but his concern did not in the least inhibit his devotional addresses to Lady Harriet.

Carlyle refers to Nero only once in the section of *Reminiscences* devoted to Jane, and then not by name, but as her “little Dog” who accompanied them on their walks in the wood at Auchtertool in 1859 (195–96). Nero’s virtual absence from these pages is indicative of the fact that what he meant to his mistress never fully impinged on her husband’s perspective of her, his notes to some of her letters notwithstanding. But, as we would expect, Nero does find recognition in the little notebook collection of her reminiscences that Geraldine collected, entitled “In Memoriam J. W. C. Ob. April 21. 1866,” and sent to Carlyle after Jane’s death.²² Having recorded that Nero went everywhere with Jane (impressionistically if not literally the case) (*Reminiscences* 61), Geraldine introduces both “dear old” Shandy, whom she could only have known from Jane’s accounts of him, and his successor, Nero, into the final paragraph of the last story in the collection, “London—Chelsea” (62–65). Of Nero, Geraldine states the simple truth: Jane “loved this dog” (65).²³ His presence might have been regarded by Thomas as inessential; all the same, he was a consequential figure in the Carlyle household because he was of such consequence to her, and the more emotionally detached from each other husband and wife became, the more crucial to Jane was the attachment between her and her dog. Tait captures both the detachment and the attachment, which need to be seen in relation to each other if his picture is to convey its full story. As a portrait of the marriage, *A Chelsea Interior* requires that Nero be allowed his place.



Nero

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NOTES

Thanks are due to Graham Handley, Emily Lane, and Michael Slater for their helpful comments on a draft of this essay. I also wish to express my gratitude to Linda Skippings and Jo Eaton of the Carlyles' house for their welcoming kindness.

1. As Virginia Woolf notes in *Flush: A Biography*, "Material for a life of [Nero] abounds" (161n). This essay draws on that material.
2. The painting (44" x 32.5") hangs in the front parlor to the left of the fireplace of the Carlyles' house in Cheyne Row.
3. The print by Caldesi is reproduced as Fig. 1 in Kenneth J. Fielding, "Robert Scott Tait" 113. The shelf number for the National Trust postcard reproduction of the painting is 012980. It should be noted, however, that a photograph by Robert Matheson encompassing the entire image is available from the National Trust Photographic Library.
4. Nero's arrival is noted in volume 24 of *CL*.
5. The dust jacket of the original publication of Rosemary Ashton's book does reproduce the whole of the picture, with Nero appearing on the jacket's back cover. The Persephone edition (2002) of Holme's book reproduces the whole of the picture inside the front cover and across the fly leaf, although in the Persephone catalogue reproduction poor Nero is not only truncated, but somewhat rearranged.
6. See Ashton 2; see also John Ruskin to JWC, November 1857 (Cate 78–79).
7. Geraldine Jewsbury recalled that when Nero died, Jane said she would never have another dog, "and she had not—until poor little 'Kleino' came to her at the death of a friend" (*Reminiscences* 65).

8. The photograph is on display in a cabinet at Carlyles' House.
9. Fielding incorrectly identifies the album as "Pictures from the Sun" ("Robert Scott Tait" 116n 3). "Tales of the Sun" is the first volume in the Thomas Carlyle collection identified as Photograph Albums 1–7; and Miscellaneous Items, 1865–1896, in the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York. The title "Tales of the Sun" does not apply to the remaining, generically bound volumes, some of which have "SCRAPBOOK" embossed on the spine. I am indebted to Tara C. Craig, the Reference Services Supervisor of the Library, both for this information and for her patience (the microfilm with which I have worked does not include the binding).
10. See Fielding, "Robert Scott Tait" 116n 10.
11. TC's note in Froude, *LM* to Jane's announcement that she had found the cottage; 2: 250; see also *CL* 30: 30n 1.
12. It was in fact six years.
13. Nero's photograph is reproduced in *CL* (30: 128); it accompanies the letter to Ellen Twisleton, but no connection with Tait's painting is suggested.
14. Geraldine appears to have been determined that her own perceived status in Jane's life should also be visually recorded: one photograph portraying the two women together is included in the album, and three of Geraldine alone. These were all taken in April 1855.
15. See TC's note to JWC's letter [23–24 August 1846]; *CL* 21: 24.
16. See GJ's letter to Froude, 22 November 1876; *CL* 30: 263–66.
17. See *Reminiscences* 156–57.
18. Organized dog stealing for ransom was prevalent in mid-nineteenth-century London. Nero's older contemporary Flush, for example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pampered golden cocker spaniel, who inspired Woolf's biography, was snatched several times by the gang known as the Fancy (led by a man called Taylor) and returned for increasingly large sums of money. See Raymond and Sullivan, vol. 1.
19. Francis Espinasse justly describes this appellation as "one not redeeming by its wit a conspicuous absence of good taste and good feeling in the giver" (153).
20. It is difficult to establish Jane's precise route. Dan Watson of the National Trust for Scotland tells me that "there is no approach to Grey Mare's Tail which could be described as a ridge with a steep descent to either side," and that, even if Jane had been climbing one of the flanking hills, Tarnberry and Deacon Snout, there is still nothing approaching a narrow ridge, though there are some craggy areas. However, the traditional approach (which is on the southwestern side) would have been considerably more dangerous in her time than it is now: "It is a fairly precipitous route for those not used to such terrain (or for those on Morphine)." I am indebted to Dan Watson for this information.
21. See also *CL* 28: 198, 200.
22. The complete collection of these anecdotes prefaces Carlyle's "Jane Welsh Carlyle" in the Fielding and Campbell edition of *Reminiscences* (41–66). An incomplete set of the anecdotes is reproduced in J. A. Froude's 1881 edition. Jewsbury also reports that she used to tell her brother Frank's little son, another Stauros, the "history" of "the little curly dog" (Howe 219).
23. Froude omits "London—Chelsea" in his edition.

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