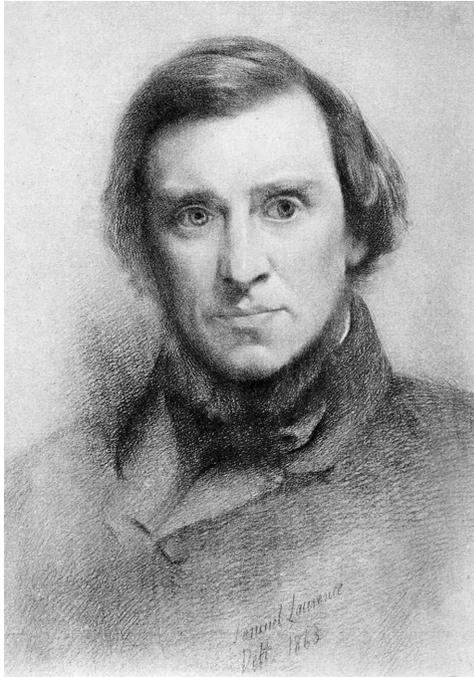


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Julia Markus. *J. Anthony Froude. The Last Undiscovered Great Victorian*. New York: Scribners, 2005. 301 pp. \$30.



*James Anthony Froude (1865), by Samuel Laurence,
From Herbert Paul, The Life of Froude (1905)*

JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE HAS BEEN DEAD FOR ALMOST 115 YEARS, and what a different epitaph he would have inspired had he refused the urgent request from Thomas Carlyle to become his biographer and literary executor. Subtitled *The Last Undiscovered Great Victorian*, Julia Markus's *J. Anthony Froude* is

only the third major biographical study of this once eminent editor and author of widely read histories, biographies, travels, and novels—the others being Herbert Paul's *Life of Froude* (1905) and Waldo H. Dunn's two volume *James Anthony Froude A Biography* (1961). A fourth, A. L. Rowse's *Froude the Historian* (1987), is a slim compendium of six biographical essays, sans index—very insightful at times, but largely about Rowse. He dedicates the book to “Hugh Trevor Roper[,] a successor to Froude as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford.” In his opening sentence he asserts: “Froude is the last of the great Victorian writers to be resuscitated and placed in his proper place among them.” Though it is clear that Rowse had read both Paul and Dunn, he continues, “It is odd that this has not been done before” (1).

Herbert Paul's biography of Froude, written quickly under deadline, was published a mere eleven years after his subject's death when the fierce fires of the Carlyle controversy were still white hot. The manuscript of Froude's *My Relations with Carlyle* (1903), a defense written in Havana in 1887, was “found after his death in a despatch-box with a copy of Mr. Carlyle's will and a few business papers” (1). Also in 1903, John Lane of The Bodley Head published *The Nemesis of Froude*, a caustic screed by TC's nephew Alexander Carlyle and Sir James Crichton-Browne, and *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, edited by Alexander Carlyle. These were the latest parries and thrusts that had begun almost two decades earlier with the publication of Charles Eliot Norton's counter-edition of TC's *Reminiscences* (1887), which was meant to correct and refute JAF's edition (1881). In his preface, Paul acknowledges “my obligation to Miss Margaret Froude for having allowed me the use of such written material as existed. A large number of Mr. Froude's letters were destroyed after his death, and it was not intended by the family that any biography of him should be written. Finding that I was engaged upon the task, Miss Froude supplied those facts, dates, and papers which were essential to the accuracy of the narrative” (v). Indeed, as Markus reports, JAF's will stipulated that “[a]ll his private papers and unpublished manuscripts were to be destroyed. And he underscored the destruction of ‘all such letters, papers and memorials of or relating to the late Mrs. Jane Welsh Carlyle’ that he had not

published in his lifetime together with ‘any unpublished manuscripts’ relating to either of the Carlyles.” Markus concludes, “Apparently there were secrets he did keep” (294).

Beginning in 1925, Froude’s surviving children, Margaret and Ashley, began giving Waldo Hilary Dunn significant pieces of their father’s surviving correspondence and notes, including lengthy sections of autobiographical text. Margaret Froude died in 1935; Ashley Froude died in 1949, and Dunn worked with this archival mother-lode for more than 35 years, finally publishing his masterpiece of a biography in 1961. Dunn was born in 1882, a year after the death of TC and twelve years before the death of JAF, and so the manners and mores of late nineteenth-century Britain and America were things he perceived from direct experience and memory.

Markus has produced from a twenty-first century perspective a very new and original rendition of Froude’s fascinating and tortured life. This is her third work of biography involving Victorian subjects. Her earlier works include *Dared and Done: the Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning* (1995) and *Across an Untried Sea: Discovering Lives Hidden in the Shadow of Convention and Time* (2000), the story of the American actor Charlotte Cushman, her friendships, and her love affairs. The Carlyles played a minor role in her book on the Brownings, but they are featured prominently in the Cushman and Froude biographies. Markus, who directs the Creative Writing department at Hofstra University, is a skilful writer of great style. In addition to these biographies, she has written at least five novels, and all but one of her books have come from major trade houses rather than from university presses. A notable coincidence is that this novelist turned biographer has given to us the biography of a biographer and historian who first wrote novels and whose largest subject, Thomas Carlyle, was a biographer and historian who first tried his hand at novels. None of the Markus biographies are festooned with callouts; attribution is managed in an afterword of Notes, chapter by chapter, of which this example is typical:

37 “greater ones”: Dunn I, 236–37.

Markus means that the quoted matter in a paragraph on page 37 that ends with “greater ones” is taken from pages 236 and 237 of the first volume of Dunn’s biography of JAF. The notes are

preceded by a key to the abbreviations. Having seen this form already in *Across an Untried Sea*, but not finding it described in any style guide, this reviewer asked an experienced hand at Chicago UP if the form has a name and a long tradition; no and yes were the answers. “Froude would have recognized it,” opined another expert, a professor emeritus of English at Duke University. The bibliography and index want additional copy-editing. For instance, North Carolina is a large state, and Duke University Press, publisher of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle (CL)*, is in Durham, North Carolina. Alexander Carlyle and Dr. James Crichton Browne collaborated on one book, not three, &c.

It is a truism of scholarship that our Victorian forebears could talk with ease about death, but were very uncomfortable discussing sex. Conversely, today we are squeamish about death and cannot shut up about sex. The Carlyles’ sexualities, presumed to have been barren, were discussed guardedly in their own times. Both John Forster and Geraldine Jewsbury gave to JAF anecdotal material that he elected to omit from his biography of TC, although in *My Relations with Carlyle* he cites Jewsbury’s view that “Carlyle did not know when he married what his constitution was. The morning after his wedding-day he tore to pieces the flower-garden at Comeley [sic] Bank in a fit of ungovernable fury” (23). Alluding to the flower-garden incident, the blue bruises years later, and a fund of similar anecdotal gossip, Markus speculates in detail about the Carlyles’ sexual histories and endeavors to persuade us that they were homosexual. In *Across an Untried Sea*, she essentially “outs” JWC, and indeed the four extant letters from Jane Carlyle among the Charlotte Cushman Papers at the Library of Congress (LOC) possess the emotionally charged diction and imagery of the most passionate *billets doux*. Still, it is difficult to imagine *physical* intimacy or excitement of any sort at that time in her life when JWC’s health, never robust, was in such rapid decline.

In *J. Anthony Froude*, Markus pursues a similar strategy and “outs” TC, linking him emotionally, if not sexually, to the subject of his *Life of John Sterling* (1851). She quotes meaningfully, though out of context, the following lines from Sterling’s letter to TC of 10 August 1844: “With regard to You and Me I cannot begin to write; having nothing for it but to keep shut

the lid of those secrets with all the iron weights that are in my power” (171). Selecting the first clause of the quote and Googling, one receives five entries in return, one of them TC’s *Life of Sterling* wherein appears the complete letter. An almost identical rendering of it appears in the third volume of JAF’s biography of TC, and it is, in fact, a deathbed letter. Quite simply, Markus’s evidence of a gay tryst is dubious. Sterling’s letter in holograph is at the National Library of Scotland (NLS), shelfmark 1766.136. Two TC letters to Sterling (9 June 1844 and 27 August 1844) that surround it also exist in holograph at the NLS and are presented textually in full in *The Carlyle Letters Online* and in the print edition of the Carlyles’ letters. Fair warning: the deeper one probes, the more tenuous Markus’s conjecture becomes. As the jazz pianist Thelonious Monk famously remarked after being administered LSD without his knowledge, “Whatever it was, it wasn’t enough.”

Although she hedges with disclaimers, Markus does not help her case by leaning so heavily on Frank Harris and his so-called autobiography, *My Life and Loves* (1963). Harris’s severest critics have dismissed this book as mere pornography; however, it has real literary merit and might be more accurately described as *erotica*. But finally, it is fantasy seasoned lightly with facts rather than vice versa, and neither the book nor its absurd author is a reliable witness to history. If one is to believe Harris, a number of very cogent people confided to him, often in their first meeting with him, their most intimate secrets: TC confessed his impotence, Aubrey Beardsley admitted that he was sexually initiated by his sister (Beardsley’s, that is), Ruskin revealed his shock in learning that the Turner abstract watercolors that he had thought to be sunsets were in fact representations of “female pudenda.” Harris devotes an entire chapter to Froude and how he came to know him.

Purportedly revealing true accounts told directly to him by Dr. Richard Quain, JWC’s attending physician, Harris recites the story of the Carlyles’ wedding night and TC’s desperate attempt at self-arousal. According to Harris, Quain examined his patient at the time of her menopause, saw proof of her virginity, and demanded an explanation. Harris would have us believe that this highly regarded practitioner gleefully recounted the episode for him in clubby detail. From the

ODNB one learns that there were two Richard Quains, both prominent physicians working in London in the 1860s. Brent E. Kinser makes a very good case that Harris *at the very least* mixed up his Quains (see 156–60), and he concludes that Harris’s “fraudulent testimony deserves to be ignored” (160).



James Thomas [Frank] Harris (1856?–1951)
Author, Editor, Raconteur, Roué (Wikipedia)

Much more plausible, and wryly entertaining as well, is Markus’s description of TC’s persistent indigestion: “Dyspeptic Carlyle, who daily fought a painful, losing battle with his own fiery innards—and did not suffer in silence—probably told Anthony [Froude] straight out that the spiritual bellyaching of *Nemesis* was worthy of the crapper” (59). This Rabelaisian *single-entendre* is set up by the Carlylean quotation in the preceding paragraph, a snippet of inspired scatography from the sage who created Diogenes Teufelsdröckh: “What on Earth is the use of a wretched mortal’s vomiting up all his interior crudities, dubitations, and spiritual agonising belly-aches into the view of the Public, and howling tragically, ‘See!’ Let him, in the Devil’s name, pass them, by the downward or other methods, into his own water-closet, and say nothing whatever!” Testing Markus’s annotation system, one finds that “nothing whatever!” keyed from page 59 is taken verbatim from *CL* 24:13; it checks perfectly. TC’s letter was to his close friend John Forster, editor of *The Examiner*. The sentence that follows is also relevant: “Epictetus’s sheep, *intending* at least to grow good wool, was a gentleman in comparison.” From its footnote and further investigation, we learn that Epictetus may have been the source behind TC’s much ballyhooed “Philosophy of Silence.” And *Silence* may be *all* that Sterling meant by “shut the lid” in his deathbed letter to TC.

Markus cites the Duke-Edinburgh edition of the Carlyle letters only thrice and explains:

The ongoing scholarly edition of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, the Duke-Edinburgh edition, has been publishing the couples' [sic] letters in chronological order for over thirty-five years, supported by two universities, top professors in two countries, graduate students, assistants, copiers, fax machines, etc. The texts produced are admirable, and slow-going. The editors have reached the letters the Carlyles wrote in the mid-1850s; they are not yet up to publishing the correspondence from the 1860s, when Froude himself arrived in London. Perhaps that is why Froude's name is mentioned generally only in reference to an occasional error in transcription or to compare a passage of his to one edited by Alexander Carlyle. (199)

Indeed so, but at least two former editors have written extensively about Froude and the Carlyles. John Clubbe, who worked as an assistant editor on the earliest volumes of the series under C. Richard Sanders at Duke University, wrote a spirited defense of Froude in the introduction to his abridged edition, *Froude's Life of Carlyle* (1979). Kenneth J. Fielding, a senior editor of the Duke-Edinburgh edition for over thirty years, later challenged Clubbe's conclusions in a detailed introduction to his Oxford edition of Carlyle's *Reminiscences* (1997), and again in his introduction to *Jane Carlyle: Newly Selected Letters* (2004). Though they offer sharply opposed viewpoints, surely Clubbe and Fielding both deserve to be mentioned in any authoritative biography of Froude.

As well as revisiting the Carlyle controversy, this biography retells the story of JAF's upbringing, the brutal discipline he endured from his sadistically pious family, the predisposition for tuberculosis that decimated the Froudes, his primary education in Totnes and his hellish preparatory education at Westminster, his university years at Oxford in the shadow of his recently deceased brother Hurrell, and his banishment from that place and from his family upon the publication of *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849). It covers his first marriage to Charlotte Grenfell and the births of their three children; trout-fishing in Wales with Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, Max Müller, and his brother-in-law the Reverend Charles Kingsley (treating us in the section of illustrations to one of Kingsley's erotic

drawings, “He Is Not Dead but Sleepeth”); reconciliation with his father; and the composition of his monumental *History of England* (1856–70).

We learn of Froude’s London years, the death of Charlotte, his editorship of *Fraser’s Magazine*, his second marriage to Henrietta Warre and the births of two more children; then in 1874, the death of Henrietta and his resignation from *Fraser’s*. Particularly pleasing is the delivery of the story of Froude’s “critic from Hell,” Oxford professor Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–92), who persecuted Froude for his alleged inaccuracies in review after review over two decades. Markus handles the dénouement with such artistry that the reader—whether anti-Froude, pro-Froude, or indifferent—is genuinely delighted when the historian is awarded the Oxford chair formerly occupied by his adversary. After the intense and protracted Carlyle period, there were friendships with Lady Derby and Madame Olga Novikoff and the ultimate honor of the Oxford regius professorship before he died peacefully, in 1894, in his library at The Mould in Salcombe, Devonshire. Although the lofty implication of her subtitle, that Froude was a “Great Victorian,” remains arguable to some, it is simply true that whether or not one agrees with Markus, her three well-written and provocative Victorian biographies belong on the bookshelves of every serious Carlyle and Victorian scholar.

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