

CAROL COLLINS

The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle. Ed. Ian Campbell, Aileen Christianson, David Sorensen, et al. Vol. 35. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

I N HIS INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 35 OF THE *COLLECTED LETTERS*, Ian Campbell indicates that it is an “unusual volume” given that TC and JWC are together during much of the time covered (January–October 1859), “rather than separated by holiday or other travel, as they had been in previous years.” The result of this “unusual” proximity is that the “hectic exchange of daily letters that each demanded—indeed insisted on with increasing vehemence—is less evident” (xiii). However, correspondence with others, which forms the bulk of this volume, reveals in a less direct manner the continuities and disruptions of their relationship. Together they compose a discordant duet in which their own concerns suggest varying degrees of separation in thought and feeling. Their comments about each other reveal the usual mixture of irritation and affection that marks all of their correspondence. JWC’s comments in a letter to TC’s sister Mary Carlyle Austin ([7 February]) might serve as a preface to any study of their marriage: “Men are curious creatures after all! and so are women for that matter!” (23).

This new volume begins with TC and JWC cooped up in Cheyne Row, with TC at work on new volumes of *Frederick the Great*. In his own words he is “a solitary galley-slave chained to his oar” (17). JWC meanwhile negotiates his moods and complains to others about his indifference to her. In a letter to Mary she exposes her frustrations in a characteristically arch imitation of “Mr C”: “The new volumes don’t seem in the way to being done a whit easier than the former ones! and meanwhile the Books and papers that are ‘lost’ every day – “*irretrievably lost!*

swept away into the abyss!' Oh CON-FOUND it! *No man was ever so situated!!* and the book or papers missing, lying all the while before his nose! My Dear! I assure you it is enough, combined with the dark winter weather, and the 'general pressure of things,' to make one invest a sixpence in arsenic! If one hadn't enjoyed the advantages of a presbyterian education!" ([mid-January]; 10). The reader is inevitably tempted to ask whether this arsenic is intended for herself or for her husband.

The volume provides plentiful evidence of TC's methods of research and his deft use of sources in *Frederick the Great*. The letters allow readers and scholars to reconstruct his great Prussian biography, and to dip in and out of the materials that he consulted in his elaborate preparation. The process of following the book's composition is simplified by the sterling work of the editors of both the online and the print edition of the collection. Their footnotes and biographical entries are consistently comprehensive and detailed, and they give us a first-hand view of Carlyle the historian at work. From a broader perspective, the benefits of reading a volume straight through are numerous. We obtain a fuller view of the breadth of TC and JWC's correspondence, a feeling for a particular time in their lives, and a deeper understanding of a historical period that at once seems close yet quite alien to our own. The strangeness of Victorian England is particularly apparent in its domestic and travel arrangements, as well as its relatively primitive means of communication.

Central to this volume is the trip to Scotland that TC and JWC undertake from June to September in order to escape London and to recover their health after a damp winter. Scotland as a source of health is already prefigured in the early letters from Chelsea to family members in Scotland, not least in JWC's exchange with Mary Carlyle Austin over the latter's gift of fresh eggs sent to London: "Oh my dear Mary! *Have* you any eggs; or do you know of anybody that has them? *Fresh* ones I mean; for there are oceans of eggs here in all possible stages of decomposition from the first *strawy* taint to the accomplished chicken!" ([3 or 10 January?]; 2-3) The saga continues with a disastrous delivery, in which some of the eggs are broken. The episode reveals the domestic pressures JWC felt in satisfying the demands of her husband: "Mr C used to *fall* back upon

bacon in these dearths; but now he *will* have fresh eggs! makes my life miserable about fresh eggs!—chiefly, I think, because he knows I can't get them!" (3).

The health of both TC and JWC is, as ever, a frequent subject of discussion. They both revel in offering advice to one another about their respective attitudes to remedies. These exchanges are invariably followed by testy accusations about insufficient levels of compassion. In May, her bitterness over her husband's seeming lack of interest in her condition boils over in a letter to her confidante Mary Russell. She explains that she was obliged to send for "the *nearest* General Practitioner" since "there was need of somebody *with authority* who *knew*, to explain to Mr C that if care were not taken, I should *die* of sheer weakness! a thing which makes no show to inexperienced eyes—especially to eyes blinded with incessant contemplation of *Frederick the Great!*" ([12 May]; 94). TC *does* show concern for his wife's health in his letters, although he is often out of kilter with her own feelings. Often he seems unable to distinguish between the issue of her health and other less pressing matters such as his sitting for Ford Madox Brown's painting *Work*, or researching the role of George II in the War of Austrian Succession.

When he does reflect on Jane's sad predicament, TC is genuinely sympathetic. To his sister Jean Carlyle Aitken he describes Jane "as weak as an infant, poor soul; and loaded daily (not in these days only) with such a burden of suffering; wh^h she bears without quarrelling with it more!" (20 April; 81)—but this concern is frequently superseded by a preoccupation with his own health: "We are too weak here (especially the poor wife), and too busy (especially the other party, who is like to be swallowed and extinguished altogether with a job too heavy for him, and too hideous)—too weak and busy for going out at all . . . even under the handiest circumstances" (to James John Garth Wilkinson, 6 June; 104). Rather than serving as a remedy to their various health problems, the trip to Scotland introduces new ailments. Writing from Aberdour JWC complains at TC taking "health *by the throat* (as it were) *Bathing* as if he were a little Boy in the Serpentine, *walking* as if he had seven-league Boots, and riding like the Wild Huntsman!—the consequences of all which is that he keeps up in him a continual fever of biliousness" (to Anne Gilchrist [ca. 10 July]; 143).

For TC these physical pursuits reveal his belief that the fresh air and exercise are beneficial. Writing to John Forster from Aberdour he suggests that, for his health, Forster “ought to be out of London altogether, in this hot season, while the Country is in all its glory and the Town in all its noise and smoulder” (10 July; 141). In such descriptions TC’s reveals his love of the Scottish countryside and his poetic ability to recreate its beauty. Of Aberdour he exclaims, “The place is one of the finest I ever saw for outlooks and situation: seas, mountains, cities, woods, fruitful cornfields; all is here in perfection, solitude, silence and a horse superadded: bathing, sauntering; walking, galloping; lazily dreaming in the lullaby of the woods & breezes, this has been nearly altogether my employment since you saw me lift anchor” (to Henry Larkin [28 July]; 160). But inevitably, TC’s enthusiasm lands him in difficulty with JWC. Eager to show her the benefits of riding, he obtains a “cuddy” for her from a family in the borders. The result is that Jane suffers an accident, which leaves her with “*three black and blue toes* and ‘loss of confidence’ in the Cuddy” (to William Dods [3 September]; 191). At times she seems to agree with TC on the benefits of the sojourn in Scotland. From Aberdour she remarks on the “difference between the dead-wall one looks out on in Cheyne Row, and the ‘view’ from our window here, unsurpassed I am sure by the Bay of Naples, or any other view on Earth!” (to Anne Gilchrist [ca. 10 July 1859]; 142). But her tone soon turns bitter after a few weeks in TC’s company. She confides to Henry Larkin, “Catch me ever again taking my holiday in the country along with a man of genius! I saw from the first that instead of a holiday it was going to be the hardest workday I had had for some time! . . . a bilious crisis bad enough to make a poor wife’s hair stand on end! and to make her ask herself twenty times a-day—if it wouldnt be better to tie herself up to her bedpost and be done with it” ([23? August] 176).

Throughout the volume JWC is haunted by melancholy over age and the death of those who are close to her. In February she speaks of the “constant expectation of hearing from Haddington that the eldest of my two dear old ladies [Jean Donaldson] is dead. . . . The other [Jess Donaldson] can’t survive her long; and then Haddington will be turned all into a church-yard for me!” (to Mary Russell [ca. 8 February]; 27). The present itself

offers few consolations. In a sour letter she berates her doctor's daughter Isabella Barnes for choosing to marry: "And you are actually going to get married! *You! Already!* And you expect me to *congratulate* you!" She then warns her of the gap between the illusion and the reality of marriage: "The Triumphal-Procession air which in our Manners and Customs, is given to Marriage at the outset—that singing of *Te Deum* before the battle has *begun*—has, since ever I could reflect, struck me as somewhat senseless and somewhat impious!" JWC's own motives become clear when she reflects on her own experience—"You had reminded me so vividly of my own youth, when I, also an only daughter—and only Child—had a Father as fond of me as proud of me!" (24 August; 179–80). The trip to Scotland gives her further cause to lament her lost past when she visits the dilapidated graveyard at Haddington where her father is buried and discovers signs of recent renovations. In September she questions William Dods about the changes, and recalls her shock at seeing the sanctuary in disrepair, "that horror of trenching, and scaffolding, and bare, trampled, heaped up earth which burst on me so unexpectedly, where I had imagined to find the old sacred stillness!" ([3 September]; 190).

To a certain extent, this is a volume in which JWC's voice is uppermost in the duet. Her ability to disarm her correspondents with humorous apologies for her tardiness in writing, her penetrating understanding of character (not least in comments on Geraldine Jewsbury), her looking outwards to others to allay her frustrations with her husband, her sense of self exhibited in her independent spirit—all of these attributes contribute to a rich portrait of her complex personality. In contrast, TC's character presents itself less vividly. Yet the human side of him emerges in his correspondence with those who seek favors or professional guidance, and in his often touching letters to family members, most notably to his brother John.

The range of his interests is wide, yet he can also delight in minutiae. He will take the time to read the entertaining but "ill-written" *Memoirs of the Master of Sinclair* and to encourage Lady Chatterton on her translation of Richter (to David Laing, 6 February; to Lady Chatterton, 6 February; 21). He corresponds happily with Thackeray about the latter's gift of pens and paper, but later refuses to discuss any possibility of

contributing to the novelist's new journal, the *Cornhill Magazine* (9 April, 67; 20 Oct; 85). He offers a restrained reaction to the publication of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, remarking to Neuberg that the book is "a strange proof of what a Thinking Gentleman amounts to at present" ([24 February?; 42). He is more candid in a later letter to his brother John: "In my life I have never read a serious ingenious clear logical Essay with more perfect and profound dissent from the basis it rests upon, and most of the conclusions it arrives at. Very strange to me indeed; a curious monition to me what a world we are in! As if it were a sin to control, or coerce into better methods, human swine in any way;—as if the greater and the more universal the 'liberty' of human creatures of the *Swine* genus, the more fatal all-destructive and intolerable were not the 'Slavery' the few human creatures of the *man* genus are thereby thrown into, and kept groaning powerless under" (4 May; 85).

TC confides in John on a personal as well as a philosophical level. He relies on him heavily for assistance in planning the trip to Scotland, and frequently writes asking about accommodation, train and boat schedules, and itineraries. TC's and JWC's separate journeys—he travels by steamer with the maid, Charlotte, his horse, and Nero the dog, while she travels by train because of her poor health—are exhaustively discussed by the two brothers. TC variously requires John to organize the purchase of a curb-chain for his bridle (11 July; 144), a pair of shoes he left at Burntisland (6 August; 163), and a host of other requirements. At times she regales the doctor with unfettered reports on his health. From Auchtertool TC notes, "[t]here is not much or indeed almost any cough; but the *end* of the wind-pipe is sorish & the *phlegm* needs to be got out (usually by one *hotch* of a cough) from time to time thro' the day" (8 July; 164). Perhaps surprisingly, John throughout retains his affection for his "Dear Brother" and never wavers in helping him. TC is appreciative, though he admits to JWC that "Jack" can be "the enemy of quiet than the friend." Nonetheless, John "knows Bradshaw [the railway timetable] better than any human soul of his day" (26 September; 219).

By the conclusion of this volume, TC's hope that the Scottish holiday will benefit JWC is disappointed. From Haddington, she informs Lady Stanley that "we have parted company (not

an hour too soon I should say, for the sanity of both!).” Her synopsis of the holiday shows how far short it has fallen of their mutual expectations: “I passed my time much like a picetted sheep! pottering about within a circle of one mile, on the most despicable of donkies! which finally flopped over on its side one day . . . plashing me on the highway . . . bruising three of my toes, and disgusting me with that species of quadruped for the rest of my life!” (18 September; 207). On her return to London, JWC admits that any benefit from the trip has been negated by the effects of the journey. But for all her sarcasm and drollness, she still evinces considerable affection for her husband. On seeing TC’s horse aboard the steamer, JWC’s feelings for the owner are transferred to the “quadrapped”: “I gave him my blessing and a parting kiss on the nose!” (to TC [14 September]; 200). When she arrives at Cheyne Row, she immediately falls to “putting down the clean drugget in the Drawingroom, ‘with my own hands,’ that you might not, on your first arrival receive the same impression of some profound gloom from the dark green carpet that drove myself towards thoughts of suicide!!” (29 September; 221). In turn, TC admits his deep need for her company: “Tomorrow Evg at the old appointed hour, I shall be ‘so happy’ to be set down beside my own poor Goody, on my own hearth again,—whether the ‘drugget’ (oh you little fool, as if I depended on druggets) be completely fixed in its place or only half fixed!—” (30 September; 222). Their relationship is fraught with miscommunication and misunderstanding, and always, it suffers from their discordant perceptions of one another. Fittingly, in her last letter in this volume, JWC remarks on the difficulty of seeing beyond impressions: “I really think Mr Carlyle is pretty well at present. . . . But he has got such a bad habit of constantly talking with exaggerative Calyleian [sic] eloquence of all his ailments . . . that it is not from what *he says*, so much as from what *oneself sees* that his amount of good or ill health is to be estimated, and of course oneself mayn’t always see clearly” (to James Carlyle the younger [late October?]; 248).