VI. The Three Histories

Miss Jewsbury’s last book, *The Three Histories*. “The History of an Enthusiast”, “The History of a Nonchalant”, “The History of a Realist”, appeared in April 1830 and was very favourably received by the press. The flashes of genius which break forth at times, particularly in the first tale, make us sense a talent which was never allowed to develop fully. This feeling is borne out by contemporary reviews. According to the *Literary Gazette*, “this is one of those books which give the impression of their author possessing higher powers than the actual work develops”,64 and the *Athenaeum* was “not only delighted with the striking talent displayed in these histories, but also with the evidence they contain of a store of wealth yet unfolded”65. Judging from the reviews, *The Three Histories* was the one among Miss Jewsbury’s books that appealed most to her contemporaries. It was regarded as her most sustained work, both from the point of view of style and characterisation. Despite minor objections, to which we shall return, the reviewers perceived Miss Jewsbury as a talented writer, unusual among women writers of the day. The *New Monthly Magazine* lavishes praise on her achievement:

It is with feelings of satisfaction that we hail another work from the pen of this lady, and one, also, of a more important character than any which has preceded it. In an age when female talent has been more cultivated than during any other, the powers of Miss Jewsbury have been deservedly acknowledged, and the progressive improvement observable in many of her shorter stories well known to readers of every class in the various annuals and other periodical publications, must have prepared, the public mind for the higher style of the present work. We also venture to assert, that Miss Jewsbury has not even yet attained the highest point to which her genius will lead her.66

64 *Literary Gazette*, 24 April 1830, p. 271.
65 *Athenaeum*, 1 May 1830, p. 258.
66 *New Monthly Magazine*, xxx (1830), 233.
The *Edinburgh Journal* was equally positive:

We have read this book with much pleasure. Miss Jewsbury is a woman of a very superior mind, and there is in her compositions an excellent mixture of soundness of judgment, warmth of feeling, and liveliness of fancy ... We wish we had more writers with the heart and soul of Miss Jewsbury; and lacking them, we wish Miss Jewsbury herself would come more frequently before the public.\(^6^7\)

As in the case of *Phantasmagoria*, Miss Jewsbury's choice of title, or rather sub-title, is unfortunate. The reviewers were at a loss to perceive what she implied by "The Enthusiast", "The Non-chalant", and "The Realist": "Had the authoress given to her tales the names simply of their respective heroes or heroines", writes the *Edinburgh Journal*, "she would not have raised expectations in the reader which are scarcely fulfilled".\(^6^8\)

The first tale, "The History of an Enthusiast", is the best and the most interesting one to a modern reader and will be the focal point of our examination. It is conceived, Ellen Moers notes, as an imitation of Mme. de Staël's *Corinna ou l'Italie* (1807).\(^6^9\) This book, translated into English in 1807, not only established Mme. de Staël's reputation in England, but, what is more important for this study, it engendered a new myth—the myth of Corinne.\(^7^0\) In *Corinna*, a glorification of female genius, the author portrays an independent woman artist of extraordinary gifts for recitation, improvisation, singing, dancing and acting, whose enthusiasm and imagination are allowed to develop freely in Italy. For many talented nineteenth-century girls reading *Corinna* became a major event of their youth, "for some, a catalyst to their own literary development".\(^7^1\) Felicia Hemans, for one, confessed that: "That

\(^{6^7}\) *Edinburgh Journal*; or, *Weekly Register of Criticism and Belles Lettres*, 8 May 1830, p. 270.
\(^{6^8}\) Ibid., 8 May 1830, p. 270.
\(^{6^9}\) Moers, op. cit., p. 269.
book has a power over me which is quite indescribable; some passages seem to give me back my own thoughts and feelings, my whole inner being, with a mirror more true than ever friend could hold up." The young Maria Jane Jewsbury could not have escaped the impact of Mme. de Staël's highly influential book. For, as Perry Miller tells us, Corinne "promptly became a troubling intrusion into all Anglo-Saxon communities. It was perpetually denounced from middle-class pulpits and assiduously read by middle-class daughters in their chambers at night", and it continued to be extremely popular in the 1820s and 1830s.

There is no doubt that in the legend of Mme. de Staël's life, which blended with the myth of Corinne, Miss Jewsbury, like her intimate friend Felicia Hemans, found a loadstar for her literary ambitions and a stimulus to her own longing to achieve fame and to be allowed to cultivate her talents freely.

Miss Jewsbury's yearnings are reflected in Julia Osborne, the heroine of "The History of an Enthusiast". She is a young and rich orphan, endowed with genius and brought up by her grandmother, Mrs. Carhampton. Her attachment to Cecil Percy is not returned, and while he is abroad he learns about her literary début. Lionised in London, Julia aspires to fame and worldly riches, but after some years she tires of a life of dissipation. A visit from Cecil, now married and on his way to the East Indies as a clergyman, brings back Julia to her senses. She realises that her life has been in vain; worldly fame is futile. She seeks refuge in travels on the continent.

As we have seen, Miss Jewsbury admitted that the first part of "The History of an Enthusiast" was largely autobiographical. It is hard to peruse these pages without perceiving that the feelings expressed here had a deeper root than the author's imagination. In fact, they constitute a remarkable attempt at presenting a representative picture of the adolescence of a talented young girl; her frustration at not having the same opportunities as boys where

72 Quoted by Moers in Literary Women, p. 269.
74 Gutwirth writes: "No other novelist whose works were not currently appearing was the subject of as many articles during this period" (op. cit., p. 281). A new translation of Corinne appeared in 1833.
education was concerned; her feeling of mental alienation from relatives and friends; her sense of possessing genius which through self-emancipation could lead her to fame—her ultimate goal in life.

Julia Osborne is acutely aware of the "tacit toleration extended to boys; from their birth they have the benefit of sex; but this toleration is never extended even to the least naughty of girls". Why should girls be treated so differently? Why was it understood "that from the cradle they ought, at all events, to be good; and neither tear books, spill ink, 'play in the pretty mud', or make a rent in the flounced white frock" (TH, 4). Much to her grandmother's dismay, Julia was a romping tomboy, but, worst of all, she was "bookish". One day Julia was caught in the apple tree reading Shakespeare. Mrs. Carhampton, with little understanding for such an occupation, exclaimed: "Shakespeare, as I live! Well to be sure". "Mercy upon us, Miss! But heathen play-acting books are not for babes like you" (TH, 8). She even goes to the extreme of having all books locked away except the Bible—all in good faith, for she

never saw any good come of people being bookish, and learned, and clever. I intend you to learn to dance though, and to paint, but above all, to be notable, and to know how to manage your house and servants, that you may make some show with your money, and not be imposed upon; therefore, you see, my dear, I do my duty when I take Shakespeare from you, for he would only fill your head with nonsense. (TH, 10-11).

This is nothing but an echo of the adolescence of Mme. de Staël's Corinne. Brought from Italy to the paternal home in Northumbria, she suffers in the uncongenial atmosphere produced by Lady Edgermond, her step-mother. This lady, in certain respects an ancestor of Miss Jewsbury's Mrs. Carhampton, abhors intellectual pursuits and advocates the role of wife and mother as the only one leading to a woman's happiness:

je ne fais aucun cas des talents qui détourne une femme de ses véritables devoirs. Il y a des actrices, des musiciens, des artistes enfin, pour amuser le monde; mais pour des femmes de notre rang, la seule destinée convenable, c'est de se consacrer à son époux, et de bien éléver ses enfants.76

75 Maria Jane Jewsbury, The Three Histories (1830), second ed. (London, 1832), p. 4. All references are to this edition and are hereafter inserted in the text.

Mrs. Carhampton, though deeply fond of her granddaughter, is an epitome of the traditional way of looking upon girls, talented or not. When Julia, thirsting for literature, asks her to "let me have some books that will not fill my head with nonsense", her wish is rejected by the following down-to-earth argument:

"My dear, don't I hear your spelling every day?—and I am going to speak to old William the clerk about teaching you to write and cypher; and in time I shall send you for a couple of years to Miss Shackleton's boarding-school; be a good child, and you shall have an excellent education—". (TH, 11).

As the Literary Gazette noted, Mrs. Carhampton is indeed, "an excellent literary sketch". Warm-hearted and generous, she is none the less unable to understand the intellectual bent of her granddaughter, for "her own excellencies all lay in her heart and in her purse, and little perception had she, that the world contained excellence of any other kind than those expressed by good nature or good fortune" (TH, 13). Mrs. Carhampton, no doubt, sprang out of Miss Jewsbury's own experiences. Many Manchester people would have rated trade, hard work and a fortune higher than the literary ambitions and flights of fancy in which the young girl indulged. That such a practical disposition did not preclude genuinely good qualities, becomes evident from the author's subtle and tolerant portrayal of Mrs. Carhampton:

She was proud at once of having made a fortune in trade, and proud of being in trade no longer; proud of being noticed by her superiors, and not too proud to show that she was so; ... An arrant specimen of prosperous vulgarity was Mrs. Carhampton; but the vulgarity was so inlaid with kindness, and proceeded so much more from ignorance of etiquette than from innately coarse feeling ... (TH, 14-15)

For Mrs. Carhampton elementary education was all that would benefit Julia, and this she obtained with less care than if purchasing a pig in the market. The education of girls was an article of trade, Miss Jewsbury implies, and with fashionable boarding-schools teaching the girls useless accomplishments, it is hardly surprising that Mrs. Carhampton, led by her practical sense, should send her granddaughter "when she reached the age of twelve, to a boarding-school for a couple of years; but as in her

77 Literary Gazette, 24 April 1830, p. 271. The Athenaeum corroborates this opinion.
opinion a school was a school, she sent her to one of the nearest, and sooth to say, not one of the best” (TH, 17). Though never explicitly stated, the author raises the crucial question why the education of a talented girl like Julia should be of no consequence, whereas, for instance, the much less intelligent Cecil Percy is sent to Oxford as a mere matter of course.

In her delineation of the germinating intellect of Julia, Miss Jewsbury drew on her own childhood reminiscences, reinforced, no doubt, by her reading of Corinne. For a female writer in 1830 to portray the mental struggle and growing self-awareness of a girl endowed with intellectual gifts to such a degree as to separate her from her surroundings, is a rare achievement. If Miss Jewsbury’s mind was prone to flights of the imagination, so was Julia Osborne’s, for “she had that within her which supplied, in some measure, the high intellectual instruction which it is the province of a superior teacher to impart—which clothes the dry bones of fact with the flesh and raiment of thought and fancy” (TH, 17). The following passage expresses the conflicts and hopes experienced by Julia. Like her, Miss Jewsbury suggests, many gifted girls were torn by an inward struggle, since they were never given the opportunity of satisfying their craving for learning. Instead, embroidery, plain sewing, sketching and singing were their standard occupations, aiming at making them fit objects for the marriage market:

Her mind was athirst for knowledge, and everything that was offered in lieu, so far from satisfying, disgusted. What the restless, questioning, dreaming power within her was, that made her draw inferences from everything that she beheld ...—what the power within her was, which when she read of heroes and high deeds clothed them with absolute vitality, so that the dead became the living, the past a presence, and the simple knowledge that such things had really existed, a glory and a joy—Julia knew not; ... she became, as by instinct, old in heart whilst young in years. Her mind grasped at every thing, her imagination was in a constant state of attrition; and vague, fanciful, and crude as her conceptions unavoidably were—chaotic as was the state of her intellectual being, there only wanted the magician Time, or that more powerful magician, a master passion, to evoke from the chaos a world of order and beauty. Her mind was enveloped in twilight, but it was twilight before the dawn of a summer’s day. (TH, 18-19).

Few would have surmised the passions and power that dwelt within the mind of Julia no less than within the young Maria Jane
Jewsbury. Worsted work was not sufficient to curb the mind of a young gifted woman, and if her mental force was strong enough, she would burst the bonds of convention and pour out her thoughts in the only way to which women like Miss Jewsbury and Julia Osborne had access—their writings.

Two gentlemen in Julia’s neighbourhood, however, perceive her talent. Mr. Mortimer advises Mrs. Carhampton to “buy her [Julia] books instead of trinkets” and “let her follow her bent” (TH, 20), but, having never been the worse herself “for never having had a taste for books” (TH, 20), Mrs. Carhampton refuses to listen. With Mr. Mortimer as her spokesman, Miss Jewsbury pleads for the freedom of woman’s intellect: “My good friend, that is all very well for you, particularly now, at your time of life; but you are not doing your duty by that girl—she is not so to be satisfied; I tell you she has real genius” (TH, 21). It is interesting to note that, like her elder sister, Geraldine Jewsbury later also created a woman of strong intellect and passions—Zoe, in the novel with the same name. Furthermore, just as Zoe, with her masculine mind, is given a boy’s education by her uncle, Mr. Percy, Cecil’s father, strongly recommends this for Julia Osborne: “Had his young friend been his own daughter he would in a private sphere, and with the modifications rendered necessary by her sex, have given her the education of a boy” (TH, 47). That the two sisters should have portrayed heroines who are intellectual misfits in society and revolt against the traditional role prescribed for girls is hardly a coincidence. It reflects, perhaps, hidden but strong frustrations which permeated the lives of both Maria Jane and Geraldine Jewsbury, frustrations which may have been reinforced by their assimilation of the myth of Corinne.

One episode further indicates Miss Jewsbury’s indebtedness to Corinne. Mme. de Staël’s depiction of Corinne, the embodiment of glory and fame, and of Lucile, the angelic, shy girl whose only aspiration is to become the wife of Oswald, the male protagonist, finds a parallel in Maria Jane Jewsbury’s representation of the intellectual girl versus the conventional woman—Julia Osborne and Annette Mortimer. When the two girls are asked by Mr. Mortimer, Annette’s father, about their ultimate goal in life, Julia chooses fame, whereas her friend would rather “make a charming wife” (TH, 22). To Mr. Mortimer’s question, “And what good would fame do you,—a woman”? Julia replies: “It would make amends for being a woman—I should not pass away and perish”
Fame would make up for the handicap of being a woman in the nineteenth century. Not to become a mere speck of dust becomes a passion with Julia and she exclaims: "O Fame! let me not pass away unknown, a hidden rill in the world's mighty forest; lay me in the grave, if so be thou wilt, then build over me a monument—only come" *(TH, 51).* Miss Jewsbury obviously felt that for a woman, genius tended to become a millstone, and her Julia cries out:

Ah! what is genius to women, but a splendid misfortune! What is fame to woman, but a dazzling degradation! She is exposed to the pitiless gaze of admiration; but little respect, and no love, blends with it. In society she is regarded as "a highly curious thing". *(TH, 131).*

Clearly, genius in a woman was a gift which in the nineteenth century created great complications for her, in so far that it filled her with a sense of frustration at not having the same outlets for her mental powers as men, and, if expressed in literary creation, it exposed her to the admiration of some but the envy and contempt of many. She became a freak, not the sort of woman a man was anxious to marry. Much sought after in society on account of her sparkling wit and quick mind, Miss Jewsbury had first-hand experience of what it was to be lionised—to become an object of curiosity. This is also reflected in "The History of an Enthusiast":

However much as an individual she [Julia] may have gained in name, and rank, and fortune, she has suffered as a woman; in the history of letters she may be associated with man, but her own sweet life is lost; ... She is a reed shaken with the wind; a splendid exotic nurtured for display; an ornament to be worn only on birth-nights and festivals. *(TH, 132).*

Miss Jewsbury comes near the truth when Cecil Percy points out to Julia: "But I should not like a lioness for a wife, Miss Osborne" *(TH, 141).* In this Cecil follows in the footsteps of Mme. de Staël's

78 For the dangers associated with female genius contemporary reviewers showed little, if any, understanding. The *Athenaeum*, for one, holds that Miss Jewsbury "would infer that splendid talents in woman are not compatible with her happiness—we believe differently. Woman is not less happy, and surely not less beloved, because heaven has blessed her with genius; it is only when, scorning the softer affections of her own sex, she aspires to the less amiable and more ambitious feelings of man, that genius becomes the thorn "to prick and sting her",—it is only then (at least this is our reading of the world) that she becomes a *blue*, and not because she has superlative genius" *(Athenaeum, 1 May 1830, p. 259).*
Oswald who, at the end, sacrifices his love for the publicly-acclaimed Corinne for the meek womanliness of Lucile Edgermond. Just as Corinne has shown that female genius was incompatible with woman’s traditional role in society, Julia confirms the bitter truth that man dreads “high intellect in woman ... because it interferes with his implanted and imbibed ideas of domestic life and womanly duty” (TH, 150).

Towards the end of the story, Julia’s persistent ambition gives way to disillusion. The Three Histories, written after Miss Jewsbury’s religious crisis, displays her conviction that fame, riches and fashionable society are all futile, unless accompanied by Christian faith. This is borne out by her lines to Geraldine: “I do fear on reviewing the late six weeks that I myself have felt & suffered from the soul-deadening influence of fascinating society unconnected with a religious spirit; & I half fear that I have not been so watchful over you as I ought to have been”. Julia’s mental inertia and despondency grow and her outcry epitomises the frustration, no doubt, felt by many of her fellow countrywomen:

A man may erect himself from such a state of despondency; throwing all his energies into some great work ... But a woman’s mind—what is it?—a woman—what can she do?—her head is, after all, only another heart; she reveals her feelings through the medium of her imagination; she tells her dreams and dies. (TH, 134).

This cry of human agony may well have reflected Miss Jewsbury’s thoughts as a writer, even if her religious side repressed them and

79 Mrs. Ellis describes the conflict between mind and conventions experienced by early nineteenth-century women much more perceptively than the male reviewers and touches on the core of the problem both in Miss Jewsbury’s and in Julia’s cases: “It is well-known truth, that genius is a fearful, and sometimes fatal gift; and genius of that particular kind which distinguished the character of Miss Jewsbury, is perhaps the most to be feared in connexion with the happiness or misery of its possessor. The author of the “Enthusiast” has, in that story, bequeathed to the world, a striking and a most melancholy picture of the ceaseless conflict, the insatiable thirst for what is unattainable, and the final wretchedness necessarily attendant upon the ungoverned ambition of superior intellect, when associated with the weakness, natural dependence, and susceptibility of woman” (“Mrs. Fletcher, Late Miss Jewsbury”, Christian Keepsake for 1838, pp. 31-32).

80 Undated letter by Maria Jane Jewsbury to her sister Geraldine in Rylands Eng. MS. 1320.
induced her to see religion as the ultimate end of life. Whereas she was saved by her faith and marriage from becoming the toy of society, Julia was not. Disappointed in fame and fashionable life in London, Julia no longer regards fame as her goal; "physically weary of living constantly at high pressure, she dreamed next of a quiet one [i.e. life]; vexed in the end with crowds and compliments, the first selfish, the last hollow, she began to yearn after a life of affection" (TH, 124). The magic halo surrounding distinction had vanished.

The narrator’s or protagonist’s views are, of course, not always identical with those of the author. That the ideas about fame and genius expressed in The Three Histories are Miss Jewsbury’s own, however, is further evidenced by a letter to Geraldine where she warns her sister that “the wreath of Fame is often a fiery crown”, and urges her to

Achieve genius how you will—but ... if undevoted to God, the jewel is not without a flaw. Cultivate your mind how you please—but remember the intellect of an angel finds no resting place but in God. The lofty spirits of Heaven do not desire to “look into the secrets of science ... the sparkling fancies of wit—” but into the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The intellectual mind has a glory, but the renewed soul has a glory that excelleth. Splendid ideas are good, but a humble heart is better. You will remember that even when a highly gifted Christian comes to die—he must pass the gates of Death & enter those Heaven with the very <...> that serves the meanest—“God be merciful to me a sinner”.83

In view of the above letter, it is possible to argue that it was not genius itself she blamed for Julia’s tragedy, but genius devoid of Christian faith.

81 Mrs. Ellis justly comments: “who can read this description of the fate of an ambitious woman without believing that the writer must herself have played upon the brink of that precipice, down which her heroine had plunged; and the more feelingly we contemplate the degree and suffering and temptation to which her own ardent nature was liable, the more we rejoice that she listened to the warnings of the still small voice, and retreated to a safe resting-place, and found that shelter and repose, which, beloved and admired as she was, she never could have enjoyed as the idol of society” (“Mrs. Fletcher, Late Miss Jewsbury”, Christian Keepsake for 1838, p. 40).
82 Undated letter by Maria Jane Jewsbury to her sister Geraldine in Rylands Eng. MS. 1320.
83 Undated letter by Maria Jane Jewsbury to her sister Geraldine in Rylands Eng. MS. 1320.
Moreover, "The History of an Enthusiast" assails the follies of society in a manner reminiscent of the satirical essays in *Phantasmagoria*. Miss Jewsbury's spokesman, Julia Osborne, confides to her friend Annette:

And society, that I coveted so much, and that has done so much for me—this robed, and crowned, and sceptered skeleton—this splendid mausoleum—this Moloch with diamond eyes—I begin to pierce its disguises—to apprehend its superb mockeries. Or call it an imperial pageant—a triumphant procession in which I am an actor;—well, if I wear a purple robe, I walk amongst the—chained: or call me a spectator only of the same procession, still, Annette, I am exquisitely weary when the glare and excitement of its shows and games are past. None know better than I do that this society is magnificent in its outward aspect, but in detail it will not bear inspection. The temple is barbaric not Grecian; the worship is idolatrous, not Christian. It is a divinity, generous in apparel, but a fire is concealed within its hollow bosom, and whosoever worships must cast therein the first-born of his soul—simplicity. (TH, 130-31)

In her awareness of the outward magnificence but inward rottenness of society, Maria Jane Jewsbury foreshadows her sister Geraldine's descriptions of false appearances in, above all, *The Half-Sisters* (1848) and *Marian Withers* (1851). From the point of view of characters and ideas, "The History of an Enthusiast" is Miss Jewsbury's most interesting tale and her portrait of Julia Osborne becomes a powerful plea to her readers not to stifle the intellects of women.

"The History of a Nonchalant" portrays a young man who, like Julia Osborne possesses intellectual gifts that alienate him from his family. Unlike Julia, however and in this lies the main interest of the tale, he suffers from religious doubt. He would not have become a sceptic "if those who instructed me in religion had remembered that I possessed affections and reason, no less than conscience" (TH, 195). The young man's questions about faith are turned down, and he begins to feel that the Christian faith will not "bear close inspection" (TH, 203). That Christianity is not presented as a religion of love and forgiveness contributes to planting the seed of doubt in his mind:

The grave, the shroud, the dying nature of all around me, death in its multiform, perpetual, ever-present aspect, the reign of grief and evil, the tremendous doom of the wicked, the terrors of an Omniscient Judge—
these were the statements continually and arbitrarily pressed on me. 

(TH, 204).

The importance of "The History of a Nonchalant" lies in the ideas propounded in it. Miss Jewsbury's early attempt at describing the gestation of doubt in a young man's mind anticipates Geraldine Jewsbury's Zoe (1845), the first novel of faith and doubt. Apart from being exposed to the religious debate of the early 1840s, Geraldine is likely both to have discussed the subject with her elder sister, and, when she makes the male protagonist, Everhard Burrows, pass through stages of religious doubt, she may have had Maria Jane's portrait of the Nonchalant in mind. "The History of a Nonchalant" thus constitutes a germ for the numerous novels of religious doubt which were to culminate in Mrs. Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere.

VII. MARIA JANE JEWSBURY AND THE ATHENAEUM

The favourable reception of The Three Histories in May 1830 firmly established Maria Jane Jewsbury's position as a promising writer and enabled her to move into the field of journalism. From 1830 to 1832 many of her best writings, it has been claimed, appeared anonymously in the pages of the Athenaeum—reviews and original compositions in prose and verse.84

The Athenaeum was founded in January 1828. The habit of printing long quotations from and summaries of books reviewed made it a fore-runner of many literary weeklies and marked a departure from the long reviews in the quarterlies.85 When Charles Wentworth Dilke took on the editorship in 1830 he declared war on the current practice of "puffery", i.e. puffing for certain publishers' books, which was customary in, for instance, the Literary Gazette. Dilke built up the reputation of the Athenaeum for fairness and independence, and he gathered

84 Taylor claims that "much of her best writing is to be found in its pages between the years 1830-32" (op. cit., iii. 38). This opinion is corroborated by Jane Williams (op. cit., p. 369) and Susan Howe (op. cit., p. 10). Since there is no way of tracing Miss Jewsbury's contributions to the Athenaeum for 1832, that particular volume not being marked, Taylor's conclusion must at best be based on hearsay.

around him a staff of competent critics who gave the weekly its prestige.\textsuperscript{86} However, Dilke's campaign was not only directed against publishers using periodicals to puff their books, but also against biased reviewers. In his opinion reviews should be free from personal enmity or friendship, and the \textit{Athenaeum} soon came to be regarded as a literary weekly that dealt fairly with reviewed books. Dilke's success was evident. Originally a sixteen-page weekly, sold at 8d., the \textit{Athenaeum} became under his editorship a 24-page weekly which could be bought at only 4d. As a result of its growing prestige and reduced price, the edition of 6,000 weekly copies sold in 1831 reached 18,000 by 1832,\textsuperscript{87} and publishers began to recognise the weekly as one of the best media for book advertisements. It is hardly surprising that, as Leslie Marchand observes,

The general fairness of its reviews, its reliance on facts and trust in knowledge (perceived with scientific accuracy and trustfulness) to solve the problems of the individual and of society, had given the \textit{Athenaeum} a prestige by the time Dilke gave up the editorship [in 1846], surpassing that of even the great quarterlies.\textsuperscript{88}

This was, then, the weekly literary journal which secured Miss Jewsbury’s talent. She was the only single woman on the staff of the \textit{Athenaeum} whom Dilke ranked as an intimate friend:

In this second period his [Dilke’s] chief intimate friends were the Hoods, the Morgans, Chorley, Charles Lamb, Allan Cunningham, Dickens, John Forster, Miss Jewsbury, and Douglas Jerrold. His most noticeable friends or acquaintances, Thackeray, Cobden, Barry Cornwall and Mrs. Procter, Lady Blessington, Mrs. Austin, L.E.L., Landor, Hook, George Darley, Moscheles, N.P. Willis, Mrs. Hemans, Miss Mitford, Bulwer, the Howitts and the Brownings.\textsuperscript{89}

Such was Miss Jewsbury’s relationship with Dilke that on her recommendation he hired Henry Fothergill Chorley to report on the inauguration of the Manchester—Liverpool railway in 1830,

\textsuperscript{86} See ibid., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., pp. 44-45.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., pp. 75-76.
\textsuperscript{89} Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, \textit{The Papers of a Critic. Selected from the Writings of the Late Charles Wentworth Dilke. With a Biographical Sketch by His Grandson, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, Bart., M.P.} (London, 1875), i. 24.
an engagement which resulted in Chorley being employed on a permanent basis in 1833 as music critic and literary critic.\textsuperscript{90}

With the aid of the marked file of the \textit{Athenaeum}, in which the editor from 5 June 1830 wrote in the names of the contributors—practically all contributions were published anonymously—it is to a large degree possible to establish which ones stem from Miss Jewsbury's pen.\textsuperscript{91} In 1831 she reviewed no less than fifty-four different publications. Not being a novelist herself, she was seldom given novels to review; the majority were books of poetry, educational, biographical and religious works, travel books and books for children. In conformity with the contemporary custom, one review often dealt with two or three publications. Whereas some reviews, appearing under the heading "Our Library Table", were as short as eight or ten lines, others spread over two or three three-column pages, sometimes, as her reputation grew, opening the weekly issue. With novels published in three volumes and educational and religious works usually being of considerable length, Maria Jane Jewsbury must have been very busy reading and reviewing. In addition, she contributed original poems and essays.

On the whole Miss Jewsbury gives the impression of being a conscientious and painstaking reviewer, seldom given to exaggerations. Reviewing R.C. Campbell's \textit{Lays from the East}, she tries to refrain from being scathing in her criticism:

Were we inclined for a good slaughtering article, and to play the gentle savage at Mr. Campbell's expense, nothing would be easier; but there is, with all his glitter and tinsel, a spirit, flow, and feeling about many of his verses—an earnestness of inclination about him, that effectually represses all desire to do him harm.\textsuperscript{92}

Nevertheless, \textit{The Poetical Works of C.B. Ash, of Adbaston} were


\textsuperscript{91} I should like to express my gratitude to the staff of the \textit{New Statesman}—in whose stronghold the marked file is kept—for placing the marked file at my disposal, thus enabling me to identify Maria Jane Jewsbury's contributions. Unfortunately, as stated above, the volume for 1832 is not marked and, therefore, I have focused my discussion on 1831. A complete list of all her contributions that can be traced will be found in the Appendix to this article.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Athenaeum}, 19 March 1831, p. 180. References to the journal are hereafter inserted in the text.
so poor that Miss Jewbury pours out her wit at the expense of Mr. Ash. The review reads:

This *Ash* of Adbaston has for some weeks been marked for falling: root, branch, and foliage, it covers some six hundred acres—pages, we mean; and were not other matter so pressing, might warrant a more particular introduction to the critical saw-pit. (*Athenaeum*, 24 Dec. 1831, p. 830).

This type of review constitutes an exception. As a rule Miss Jewsbury did not resort to emotional criticism, but stated her reasons for disapproving of a book in a detached manner. It is thus that she clearly gives her reasons for disliking, for instance, Walter Savage Landor’s *Gebir; Count Julian; and Other Poems*. Fearless of the prestige connected with a well-known name, she spoke her mind:

but certainly, it is much easier to point out the faults than beauties of “Gebir”, “Count Julian”, and the rest of the volume before us. A common reader of poetry will be disgusted at the outset by the stiff, abstract, mythological cast of incident—by the absence of what is palpable either to the heart or fancy—and by the absurd spelling that absolutely vexes the eye and distracts the attention. (*Athenaeum*, 21 May 1831, p. 324).

Miss Jewsbury was, as we have seen, very interested in the position and opportunities of women writers. In her review of Joanna Baillie’s *The Nature and Dignity of Christ*, she makes a perceptive analysis of the basic difference, as she sees it, between women writers active around the turn of the century and her own generation:

It would afford a subject for a long and not uninteresting article to point out the striking difference in the mind and writings of the literary women of thirty and forty years ago, and the literary women of the present time: those who have not perused their writings in connexion, will hardly believe how great is the difference;—what a commentary the perusal affords on the entire change that has obtained in habits, manners, feelings, education, tastes, and life! Amongst the elders—with Joanna Baillie at their head, as regards mind—the distinguishing features are nerve, simplicity, vigour, continuity, unambitious earnestness, and good English ... Our elder literary women were, in the spirit of their intellect, more essentially masculine; our younger ones are integrally feminine. (*Athenaeum*, 28 May 1831, p. 337).

Miss Jewsbury herself seems to bridge the two generations of writers in so far as she combines the nerve, simplicity and vigour...
of the older writers and the soft, feminine, lyrical ambitions of the younger ones.

Amongst the prose essays, two are devoted to women writers—to Felicia Hemans and Jane Austen. The first essay, though knowledgeable, is tinged by her personal friendship with the poetess:

Were there to be a feminine literary house of commons, Felicia Hemans might very worthily be called to fill the chair as the speaker—a representative of the whole body, as distinguished from the other estates of the intellectual realm ... Her womanliness is to her intellectual qualities as the morning mist to the landscape, or the evening dew to the flower—that which enhances loveliness without diminishing lustre. (Athenaeum, 12 Feb. 1831, pp. 104-05).

With Jane Austen, on the other hand, no personal acquaintance, of course, could make Miss Jewsbury biased, and the result is a detached account of Jane Austin's qualities as a writer, with a penetrating analysis of the construction of the novels. Again, Miss Jewsbury is concerned with the difficult role in society to which talented women were subjected:

In society, she [Jane Austen] had too much wit to lay herself open to the charge of being too witty; and discriminated too well to attract notice to her discrimination ... [she] acted on the principle of another, that "if a woman have the misfortune of knowing anything, she should conceal it as well as she can". (Athenaeum, 27 Aug. 1831, pp. 553-54).

It is in her appraisal of Shelley's Wandering Jew, however, that Miss Jewsbury's talent for literary criticism reaches its peak. At a time when Shelley was generally misunderstood, and even abused, Maria Jane Jewsbury realised that justice had not yet been done to the poet. Appearing under "ORIGINAL PAPERS", rather than reviews, her essay on Shelley gives us an idea of the standard she might have attained, had she not died at the age of thirty-three. She was remarkable in penetrating to the core of his poetry. This is Miss Jewsbury, the literary critic, at her best:

... whilst, in the way of scorn, calumny, and unkindness, brimming measure has been dealt out to Shelley, few connected with periodical literature have taken the trouble to understand and appreciate his poetry, or to draw, for the benefit of the public, a boundary-line between his metaphysical subtleties and moral mistakes, and the remaining mass of his true, pure, beautiful poetry,—poetry instinct with intellectual life—radiant, harmonious, and strong ... Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley,
may be called the representatives of the past, the present, and the future. Between the first and last there is some analogy, since both agree in disapproving that connecting link to which Lord Byron adapted himself, and, whilst less philosophical became more popular than his mightier brothers ... He [Shelley] does not deal with things, but thoughts, and thoughts that are often sublimated into phantoms. The very cadence of his verse, the structure of his language, seems the struggle of spirit with sound and form, manifests a yearning after immateriality—a desire to make mere words ethereal essences, impersonations of beauty—melody woke by the wind, drank by the dew, heard by the heart, and giving birth to dreams of things not earthly ...

With the exception of Coleridge, the English language has not such a consummate master of harmony—nor, with the same exception and the addition of Wordsworth, a poet possesssing such an exquisite knowledge of external nature, from its grander aspects amongst seas and mountains, to its fine and silent pencilling amongst moss and flowers. (Athenaeum, 16 July 1831, pp. 456-57.

It is hardly surprising when one reads Miss Jewsbury's "Provincial Letters—No. 1" that Wordsworth, Mrs. Hemans and Alaric Watts should all have been struck by her remarkable wit. In this essay, she tries to persuade Dilke, the editor of the Athenaeum, to leave the capital for one of the fashionable watering-places. Herself a convalescent at Leamington, Miss Jewsbury had first-hand experience of life at a spa, and succeeds in rendering that particular atmosphere in a highly amusing manner:

... I neither like pumps, because I hate dancing, nor pump-rooms, because I detest mineral waters: so that if—but that's a secret; but if it were not for something, I should vote a watering-place worse than a ride on a tame tiger. Nevertheless, I seriously wish you would journey down for a few days; and I send my invitation in sober seriousness, out of regard to the health of yourself and paper. Upon my honour, the jaunt would pay—and that, I know, is the being's end and aim of everybody in the book and paper line. Yes, you might pick up some good smart articles in the reviewing-line, merely by sitting in the libraries;—such criticism as does not often bless your ears; and such as would give a far truer idea of the sentiments of the reading public touching "new works", than any you can imagine by poring over them, spectacles on nose, pen in hand, and vexation in heart. Come down here, my good friend, and I will present you to a young lady-librarian who shall dissect you a leash of novels in the finest style of art. Your Athenaeum shall shine the week after like an open case of cutlery .......

But, over and above all this, I want you to tell me all about London; and whilst I administer soothing syrups and anodynes, I want
to receive stimulants and caviare, scandal, news and nonsense, literary and fashionable. To speak truth, some of my time hangs heavily, not but what I am most amazingly in love with Laura Matilda, but, entre nous, when a man has been engaged six months, the peculiar excitement of being "in love" is rather worn off ... only after escorting my adored charmer to the pump-room, to the libraries, to the gardens, to the milliners, and taking her a wood-land ride in the double capacity of lover and whipper-in (to the animal she rides, for it is a donkey)—why, you see, one may be ready after all this for a little male talk and a plate of olives ... As a clincher to all and sundry the motives I have mentioned, in the said opposite field are two broods of chickens the growth of which I watch eagerly, trusting they will be large enough to be killed by the time you come; and their mothers, two most respectable white hens, have for ever raised the female sex in my estimation. Never did I see such disinterested scratching for the good of others! such patient providing for the picking propensities of children. Come, and let us eat them—the children, I mean. Good bye! (Athenaeum, 16 April 1831, pp. 250-51).

The above extract is an example of Miss Jewsbury at her best. It bears the hallmark of her personal style, whose foremost characteristics are wit, humour and irony combined with a certain bluntness and concreteness. When it came to book-reviewing and essay-writing, Geraldine Jewsbury had a pioneer in her elder sister, whose writings are likely to have served as an incitement for Geraldine's thirty-year-long journalistic career as a reviewer for the Athenaeum.

VIII. MARRIAGE AND INDIA

In March 1832 Maria Jane Jewsbury confessed in a letter to Dora Wordsworth that, despite her father's strong opposition, she had consented to marry the clergyman William Kew Fletcher. In August 1832 she married him, and shortly afterwards the newlyweds embarked on the Victory to sail to India, where Mr. Fletcher had been appointed chaplain of the East India Company. Mrs. Fletcher kept a journal during the three-months' voyage first to Ceylon and from there to Bombay. Little is known of her life in India. She accompanied her husband on his expeditions to

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93 Letter reprinted in Gillett, pp. lv.-lvi.
94 All attempts to trace Miss Jewsbury's journal have been in vain. Gillett reprints "Extracts from a Lady's Log-Book" (ibid., pp. 87-89), which may well be the same thing as the "journal". Endeavours to get in touch with Mr. Gillett through his publishers have led to no result.
mitigate the sufferings of the population, tormented by drought and famine. In this work her Christian spirit was brought to the fore and Mrs. Ellis writes:

Sustained by that faith which gives strength to the feeble, and energy to the desponding, she devoted herself to her husband through a severe and protracted illness; and when disease was raging around her, and famine presented every aspect of wretchedness to her compassionate view, her abode was thronged by the native women and children, whose sufferings were not only commiserated, but as far as possible relieved. It was in this way that she sought to win the hearts of the people—... to convince them that her religion was one which led those who received it to delight in binding up the broken-hearted.\(^95\)

Mrs. Fletcher herself was, however, attacked by illness and died of cholera at Poonah on 4 October 1833. It took months for the news of her death to reach England, and in June 1834 the *Athenaeum* published an obituary essay entitled "Mrs. Fletcher" containing part of a letter written by her to Mrs. Hemans. It reflects her state of depression just before leaving England\(^96\) and is of particular interest, since, in it, she looks back on her literary career. Her sincere confession opens:

The passion for literary distinction consumed me from nine years old. I had no advantages—great obstacles—and now, when from disgust I cannot write a line to please myself, I look back with regret to the days when facility and audacity went hand in hand. I wish in vain for the simplicity that neither dreaded criticism nor knew fear. Intense labour has, in some measure, supplied the deficiencies of early idleness and commonplace instruction; intercourse with those who were once distant and bright as the stars, has become a thing of course; I have not been unsuccessful in my own career. But the period of timidity and of sadness is come now, and with my foot on the threshold of a new life and a new world, I could lie down like a tired child, and weep away this life of care. ... Unfortunately, I was twenty-one before I became a reader, and I became a writer almost as soon; it is the ruin of all the young talent of the

\(^{95}\) Ellis, "Mrs. Fletcher, Late Miss Jewsbury", *Christian Keepsake for 1838*, pp. 41-42.

\(^{96}\) The *Athenaeum* only says it was written to a friend, but since some passages are identical with those reprinted by Chorley in his *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans*, i. 171, we may safely assume that the letter was addressed to Mrs. Hemans. Gillett, who also quotes part of the same letter, claims that it was addressed to Mrs. S.C. Hall (op. cit., p. lxv). For the above reasons, I agree with Chorley.
day, that reading and writing are simultaneous. We do not educate ourselves for literary enterprise. Some never awake to the consciousness for the better things neglected; and if one like myself is at last seized upon by a blended passion for knowledge and for truth, he has probably committed himself by a series of jejeune efforts—the standard of inferiority is erected, and the curse of mere cleverness clings to his name. I would gladly burn almost everything I ever wrote, if so be that I might start now with a mind that has seen, read, thought, and suffered, somewhat at least approaching to a preparation. Alas! alas! we all sacrifice the palm-tree to obtain the temporary draught of wine! We slay the camel that would bear us through the desert, because we will not endure a moment of thirst.

It is as if Mrs. Fletcher had presentiments of her death. The engaging lines below read like a farewell letter in which its author bids goodbye to her literary career. Because she wrote and published before she was full-fledged, she argues, posterity would only be able to sense what she might have become. Her true genius was never allowed to blossom:

_I have done nothing to live_, and what I have yet done, must pass away with a thousand other blossoms, the growth, the beauty, and oblivion of a day. The powers which I feel, and of which I have given promise, _may_ mature—_may_ stamp themselves in act; but the spirit of despondency is strong upon the future exile, and I fear they never will—I feel the long grass growing _o'er_ my heart, ... In the best of everything I have done, you will find one leading idea—death: all thoughts, all images, all contrasts of thoughts and images, are derived from living much in the valley of that shadow; from having _learned_ life rather in the vicissitudes of man than of woman, from the mind being _Hebraic_. My poetry, except some half dozen pieces, may be consigned to oblivion; but in all you would find the sober hue, which to my mind's eye, blends equally with the golden glow of sunset and the bright green of spring—and is seen equally in the "temple of delight" as in the tomb of decay and separation. I am melancholy by nature, cheerful on principle.

Maria Jane Jewsbury's letter to Mrs. Hemans touches on a basic problem. There was a continuous strife inside her: deep melancholy vied with humour. Satirical and witty, she was, nevertheless, basically a serious writer whose obsession with religion permeates...
what she considered her best writings. Whereas the amusing surface may blind us to the true nature of the author's inclination, her candid letters to her sister provide a valuable clue to a proper understanding of her mind. We must, however, allow for the change of taste that has taken place since the early nineteenth century, and for a modern reader it is hardly Miss Jewsbury's melancholy vein that makes the deepest impression, but her satire and the ideas expressed in the writings.

Today, Maria Jane Jewsbury's name has fallen into oblivion; when her heroine Julia argues that a woman merely "tells her dreams and dies", this rings all but too true in the author's own case. Yet, in the current vogue of re-assessing nineteenth-century women writers, to which this essay hopes to be a contribution, it becomes evident that this neglected Manchester writer is of considerable interest and deserves a better fate than that which Julia dreaded—"to pass away unknown, a hidden rill in the world's mighty forest".

APPENDIX

Maria Jane Jewsbury's known contributions to the *Athenaeum* are listed below. The marked file of the *Athenaeum* opens on 5 June 1830, and covers the whole of 1831; 1832 has not been marked by the editor.

1830

28 August, p. 529  "Perryian Principles".
11 September, p. 571  "A Lay of Thrift. Addressed to a Lady Occupied in Needle-Work".
18 September, p. 588  "Translation of a German Watchman's Song".
4 December, pp. 758-60

1831

5 February, pp. 86-88

12 February, pp. 104-05
ORIGINAL PAPERS. LITERARY SKETCHES. No. I “Felicia Hemans”.

26 February, p. 135

26 February, p. 136

26 February, p. 137
ORIGINAL PAPERS. LITERARY LAYS. THE BLUE BELLS OF ENGLAND.

5 March, pp. 147-49

5 March, p. 151

5 March, p. 154
ORIGINAL PAPERS. THE LOST BRIDE. BY MISS JEWSBURY.

12 March, pp. 167-68

19 March, pp. 180-81

2 April, pp. 215-16
Review of Recollections of Seven Years’ Residence at the Mauritius, by a Lady. London. Cawthorne.

2 April, p. 217

2 April, pp. 217-18
ORIGINAL PAPERS. “JUVENILE LITERATURE”.

9 April, p. 234

16 April, pp. 250-51
“PROVINCIAL LETTERS. — No. 1”.

23 April, pp. 262-63

30 April, pp. 280-81

7 May, pp. 291-92


4 June, pp. 358-59 Review of *Five Years of Youth; or, Sense and Sentiment*, by Harriet Martineau. London, 1831. Harvey & Darton.


18 June, pp. 389-91 Review of *Henry Pestalozzi, and his Plan of Education; being an Account of his Life and Writings, with copious Extracts from his Works, and extensive details illustrative of the Practical Parts of his Method*, by E. Biber, Ph.Dr. 8vo, London, 1831. Souter.


16 July, pp. 456-57 “SHELLEY’S ‘WANDERING JEW’”.


27 August, pp. 553-54 LITERARY WOMEN. No. II. "JANE AUSTEN".

3 September, pp. 569-70 ORIGINAL PAPERS. REMINISCENCES OF A GOODNATURED MAN.


22 October, p. 688 Review of Cameos from the Antique; or, the Cabinet of Mythology. For the Use of Children, by Mrs. Lawrence, and Pictures, Scriptural and Historical; or, the Cabinet of History, by the same author.

29 October, p. 706 Review of Le Traducteur; or, Selections from the Best French Writers, by P.F. Merlet.


