

All Shut Up: Carlyle and the Pursuit of Domestic Silence

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From the 1830s, the Victorian middle classes aspired to gloriously complex, stately and over-stuffed rooms composed from a combination of traditionally crafted artisanal and industrially produced goods. These assorted chairs, lounges, lights, carpets and wall papers were destined for installation in residences made possible by technological, legal and symbolic advancements in the meaning of domesticity. Ranging from the grand to the modest, domestic ambition could find its approximate shape in decors fashioned according to precepts formulated by an emergent class of taste professionals publishing in advertisements, newspapers, pamphlets and books. To these might be added the novels, plays, poems, songs, paintings and sermons devoted to enumerating, celebrating, and occasionally defending the pleasures of the new and densely textured surplus of home life. Of course the representations of the interiors that emerge in this period take multiple forms across various media. For my purposes though, I will select two, partly because of their apparent differences, and partly because of their omnipresence in Victorian fiction. The first, promoted by Dickens, among others, is the hearth-scene; a utopian assemblage that joins ambient light, consoling and familiar aromas to the prospect of diverting narrative. The second is less a singular location within the home than a compendium of domestic instability. Its prevailing motifs are the bankrupt's scattering of goods on the lawn, and the home ceaselessly remodelled *a la mode*.

These two opposing visions of the home – as a form of super secure refuge, and as a mode of dizzying flux and tumult – were contained, however uncomfortably, within the same four walls. Indeed, the pressure such irreconcilable forces exert on the interior is tellingly played out on the Victorian wall itself as something that promised security yet was subject to a dazzling array of penetrations: seismic, mechanical, optical, auditory, and olfactory. Each breach challenged the wall as an effective keeper of secrets, as a barrier to disease or as sign of prosperity. Even if the exterior wore a reassuring and respectable patina, it might nevertheless conceal the dissolution of internal walls vanishing under the organizing eye of “improvements.” Dickens captures something of these opposing pressures in his constant remodeling of Gad's Hill. At the same moment that he subjects the interior to permanent impermanence he pleads with Catherine not to change the arrangement of furniture at home while he is abroad because he cannot bear to think of it out of place (see Parker, “Dickens”, 72). He demands that the home is both a stilled theatre of memory and a plastic surface indexed according to advancements in fortune and social circle.

In this essay I want to examine how one Victorian family responded to the contradictory promise of domestic life. My test family is spectacularly unrepresentative, but in their extremity, they are – as I hope to demonstrate – instructive. They are the Carlyles of no. 5 Cheyne Row. My task here is not to reconstruct their lives with a biographer's eye but rather to focus on one of Thomas Carlyle's lesser known and certainly least appreciated works. This text – a collaborative effort undertaken with Jane Welsh Carlyle among several others – has entered literary history in the form of an anecdote. Its telling pools a number of

resources: the Carlyles's letters, reminiscences of their circle and the observations of several critics. The anecdote records Thomas Carlyle's pursuit of total silence through the construction of a soundproof room made necessary by the activities of his chief tormentors – pianoforte-playing girls, crowing cocks and organ grinders. The room proved a complete and utter failure. As Jane Welsh ruefully observed, "the silent room is the noisiest in the house" (qtd in Holme, *Carlyles*, 98). Even as a failure, the construction of the room speaks to the idea of the Victorian dwelling being held to its promise to protect its occupants from the irritations of the world beyond its boundary.

The Carlyles first occupied the house in 1834. Thomas wrote to his mother on June the 10th informing her of the move and notable acoustic features of the environs: "a fine quiet old street of about 20 houses, with huge old trees opposite us in front, and then a most silent brickwall (qtd in Kaplan, *Carlyle*, 207). The house, an unimproved Queen Anne terrace leased for an annual sum of 35 pounds, was doubly unfashionable. By the early 1840s terraces were *déclassé* and Chelsea as an area was an uncertain proposition at best (Burnett, *Social*, 101, 204). This was borne out in the curious mix of neighbours whose assorted enthusiasms and animals began to assert their right to shape the Cheyne Row soundscape. Carlyle's domestic problems originated in such issues of proximity, in the form of noises emanating from pervious adjoining walls across this weakly-defined street. Over the course of the next fifteen years Carlyle was subjected to neighbours (who, in all fairness, were equally subjected to Carlyle) whose behaviour prompted an array of responses from un-acted upon threats of astonishing vehemence and legal action, to rather elegant correspondence.

In 1839, the neighbouring Lambert family of No. 6 Cheyne Row took delivery of a pianoforte that was to become the first test of Carlyle's capacity to control his environment. In response to one of the Lambert daughters' dedication to the scales, Carlyle violently assaulted the wall with a poker "exactly opposite where he fancied the young lady seated" (Qtd in Holme, *Carlyles*, 63). Unsurprisingly, this produced a period of silence but it proved short-lived. When the music resumed Carlyle wrote a letter of which only Jane's description survives:

[He] gave me to understand that it was of the most chivalrous description professing his conviction that a 'young beautiful female soul working in the most beautiful element that of music would not willingly give annoyance to a fellow worker!!' (Qtd in Holmes, *Carlyles*, 63)

As Carlyle hails Miss Lambert as a "fellow worker," he voices – however archly – the tenuousness of his position within the home. His lack of secure vocational space generates a deeply unstable analogy with the ornamental self-improvement of lower middle-class girls. The absence of a clearly defined workspace was, as John Picker observes, a dilemma Carlyle shared with an emergent caste of housebound professional men whose place of labour doubled as their place of rest (Picker, "Soundproof", 428). These men sought to undo or re-shape the very distinction that had only recently been asserted between the domains of work and home as a space of creative leisure. Walter Benjamin describes this distinction in France under Louis-Philippe:

For the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work ... The private citizen who in the office took reality into account,

required of the interior that it should support him in his illusions. (*Baudelaire*, 167)

In fiction, the failure to properly to respect this very division contributes to a moral critique of character. Think of the uncertain domain fashioned by *Dombey*, whose “Home Department”, neither fully domestic, nor completely commercial, overlapped in a manner that cancelled both (see Ellison, “Mobile”).

The suppression of the Lambert girls encouraged Carlyle to announce his intention of settling at Cheyne Row. By 1843 he was talking about buying the house (this followed the successful publication of *Past and Present*) and carrying out a number of renovations designed to enable among other things, a weekly “soiree” – an indication of their burgeoning circle and social ascent. Although the sale fell through, the renovations went ahead as planned. Following a resurgence in the Lambert pianoforte (the girls may have felt emboldened by the construction noise across the party wall) and the addition of a crowing cock at dawn, Carlyle expressed a wish for a “well deafened observatory” (qtd in Holmes, *Carlyles*, 64).

The builder who had worked on the expansion of the drawing room was re-called but the quoted cost of the proposed observatory – 120 pounds – was deemed too high. A compromise was proposed: Carlyle’s bedroom could be rendered noiseless by stuffing the closed shutters with wool and then running zinc pipes in for the provision of air. Carlyle decided to wait until he could afford his purpose built vault but in the interim he would have a dressing room – a seven foot square closet leading out of his bedroom – altered to function as a study. Although the room had a good window it was unheated and required the installation of a new grate and chimney. Like many renovations, this small alteration swelled to include a new and enlarged bedroom for Carlyle. Jane, who had designed, superintended, and just completed a slew of major renovations within the home, was appalled by the prospect of yet more “earthquakes.” Judging from her diary entries and correspondence, the seismic metaphor was not out of place. Jane erected shanty quarters construction in doubt, in the garden, moved her bedroom up and down stairs, negotiated heaped furnishings, striking workers, and industrial accident. In spite of this disturbance, she found considerable satisfaction in her role as architect and supervisor, shaping and organizing the house around her.¹ Yet, Carlyle’s pursuit of silence within the house placed the finality of any of the construction in doubt.

Accelerate the fifteen or so years of major alteration and Cheyne Row assumes a bewildering degree of insecurity about its shape and what it might ultimately prove capable of expressing about its inhabitants. The persistent reconstruction of the Carlyle home gives form, however fluidly, to the pressures that beset contemporary notions of domesticity, particularly from the requirements of the stay-at-home professional. As Carlyle plots against the infolding of noisy life, he comes to demand an almost impossible standard of protection of the domestic, in particular on the ability of the wall to isolate and protect – from smell, sound, and unwelcome sights.²

14 In his dogged pursuit of architecturally novel silence Carlyle, as home-bound writer, also struggles with the task of inhabiting the domestic at a moment when Victorian writing – in works by Dickens, Gaskell, the Brontes, Eliot, Collins, Martineau, and others – takes the bedevilling of domestic life as its intimate subject

matter. Carlyle is sensitive to other voices that shape the rhythms, habits and possibilities of domestic life, and he wants to shut them up.

Carlyle provided his mother with a portrait of the completed room as a secure cell:

My little room here is such a curiosity as you have seldom seen; a place projecting off from my bedroom, about 7 or 8 feet square, papered on the walls, with a window in it which looks out upon gardens, trees and houses in the distance – and now with a fire place, a shelf of books, my writing-table and a chair: here I sit, lifted above the noise of the world, peremptory to let no mortal enter my privacy here; and really I begin to like it. (Qtd in Holme, *Carlyles*, 74)

Three days later the study was pronounced “an abominable confined hole of a place”. The room proved far too small to hold the books he required and Carlyle found himself shuttling back and forth to his library. Aside from this obvious inconvenience, he also found the wallpaper “a perfect solecism.” Carlyle’s description of the offending paper converts its aesthetic failure into an indiscretion, making the wall indistinguishable from that which it is designed to exclude: the rude and embarrassingly assertive noises of the street, backyards, and neighbouring homes. In other words, the failure of the wall is understood in terms of its inherent sociality rather than its promised powers of isolation. Carlyle complained that the room would need to be papered in “some reasonable way before one could feel it anything but the last refuge of a poor reduced beggar” (qtd in Holmes, *Carlyles*, 74). This attempt to secure a place to work in the house finds a disturbingly literal equivalent in the workhouse as the beggar’s last refuge. Within a brief period, then, Carlyle’s guarded observation post had transformed into its nightmarish opposite. The analogy is telling one: in the workhouse, privacy implodes under the combined weight of official scrutiny, the crammed dormitory and the demands of punitive labour.

In 1852 Jane negotiated a new and highly advantageous lease that encouraged the couple to undertake further alterations to the home. Carlyle’s noise problems had not abated, but they had changed with the departure of the Lamberts and the arrival of the Remingtons:

To G. Remington 6 Cheyne Row.

Dear Sir, – It is with great reluctance that I venture to trouble you in any way; but a kind of necessity compels me; and I trust your good nature will excuse it in a distressed neighbour.

We have the misfortune to be people of weak health in this house; bad sleepers in particular; and exceedingly sensible in the night hours to disturbances from sound. On your premises for some time there is a Cock...

If you would have the goodness to remove that small animal or in any way render him inaudible from midnight to breakfast time, such charity would work a notable relief to certain persons here, and be acknowledged by them as an act of good neighbourship. With many apologies and neighbourly respects, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

T. Carlyle (qtd in Holmes, *Carlyles*, 92)

Privately Carlyle raged against the cocks – “I would cheerfully shoot them and pay the price if discovered” – but his letter to Remington, in which neighbourliness is understood as due regard to the home-as-sanitorium, reaped the desired result and the bird was removed (Froude, *Carlyle*, vol. II, 146). In spite of this success, Carlyle was still afflicted by other disturbances. Cheyne Row had grown into a busy road and his letters could do little to silence the incessant traffic of horses, carts, vendors and the detested street musicians who plied their trade directly under his windows. These were “vagrant musical scamps with clatter bones, guitars and Nigger songs.” On other days there were organ grinders, “vile yellow Italians” who, like the cocks, stirred murderous impulses. Of one offender, Carlyle wondered “whether to go out and, if not assassinate him, call the Police upon him, or to take myself away to the bath-tub and the other side of the house? Of course I ought to choose the latter” (qtd in Kaplan, Carlyle, 367).³

By 1853 the placating Remingtons had moved on, replaced by the Roncas:

[No.6 Cheyne Row had been] let to this Ronca with his washing tubs, poultries, and mechanic sons-in-law, and become intolerable as a neighbourhood. Poor Ronca was not a bad man, though a misguided; but clear it was, at any rate that on him (alone of all London specimens), soft treatment, never so skilful, so graceful, or gentle, could produce no effect whatever. (Carlyle, Introductory note to letter 160, *Letters and Memorials*, 237)

The Ronca menagerie consisted of poultry (including Cochin China) as well as a Macaw named “Sarah”. The noise was unbearable. Amidst it Carlyle dreamed again of a kind of elevated crypt, an illuminated and acoustically void space to withdraw from London’s symptomatic cosmopolitanism of Minstrelsy, Italian organ grinders, Irish neighbors, Oriental fowl and Caribbean parrots. In time, Carlyle would have occasion to complain about the pitch of the East wind itself (Kaplan, Carlyle, 367).

Carlyle’s pursuit of silence tests the capacity of the house as a machine of exclusion, something that could filter undesirable stimuli by way of sheltering purposeful, unsentimental, domestic possibility. The final determination to proceed with the soundproof room came from the desire to be, in Jane’s words “independent of Ronca and all the contingencies” (*Letters and Memorials*, vol.II, 229). In a letter to his sister on the 11 th of August Carlyle describes his motivation for the proposed architectural cure:

All summer I have been more or less annoyed with noises, even accidental ones, which get free access through my open windows: all the tinkering and ‘repairing’ has done no good in that respect At length, after deep deliberation, I have fairly decided to have a top storey put upon the house, one big apartment, 20 feet square, with thin *double* walls, light from the top, etc., and artfully ventilated – into which no sound *can* come; and all the cocks in nature may crow around it, without my hearing a whisper of them! (Qtd in Holme, *Carlyles*, 94)

The construction unfolded under the eye of John Chorley, an ex-railway man, now a “retired philosopher.” He described the plan as follows:

Take off the present roof and build a new room; put on a new curb roof with a proper skylight made to open, and of suitable dimensions for the size of the room.

Prepare and put up a pair of horizontal glazed sashes to run easily on brass rollers under the skylight, forming an air chamber between. The roof to be boarded and covered with best Bangor slate. Form an air chamber between slating and the whole surface of the room. (Qtd in Holme, *Carlyles*, 95).

In addition the room would be provided with a fireplace, new staircase, lead-lined sink with running water and large deal cupboards. The woodwork would be painted and grained and the wall was to be covered with a good paper “as may be chosen by Mr. Carlyle”. The plan did not call for five workmen to plummet through the ceiling on separate occasions, one of them falling within a yard of where Jane stood. She recounted the incident in a letter to Alexander Carlyle: “Had he dislocated my neck, as might so easily have happened, one of us would have been provided with a ‘silent apartment’ enough, without further botheration” (qtd in Holme, *Carlyles*, 96). Jane rightly draws attention to the morbid quality of Carlyle’s desire for quiet, its resemblance to other more permanent retreats from the noisiness of life. However, I do not believe his need for silence is death-driven. Rather it represents an effort to excavate a novel, hermetic, super-secure space at some remove from the discursive possibilities contained in interior/exterior: call it the Carlyle zone, a form of shelter appropriate to his “exceptional thin-skinned thrice morbid condition” (Froude, *Carlyle*, vol.II, 63). Indeed, the whole exercise of building a room within room, a roof within a roof was an elaborate and expensive critique of the conventional interior as little more than a vitiated exterior. The area without the soundproof room was hopelessly penetrated by environmental noise that ought to have remained permanently repulsed by the grave promise of masonry. But within his chamber, sound would terminate through the combined agencies of slate, air pocket and thin horsehair plaster. Although Chorley’s design was woefully ill considered, it remains a fascinating experiment in symbolic architecture.⁴ The defensive double skinned walls, joined with other self-sufficient provisions (cupboards, plumbing, heating, Jane’s choice of wallpaper), attempt to define a psychic as much as a physical limit. From this point onwards there is to be only Carlylean white noise: the flick of paper, the scratch of pen, the tambor of his respiration and the gurgle of a digestive system struggling under the effect of Jane’s frequently prescribed little blue pills.⁵ The silence he desired is an acoustical construction amenable to the projection, amplification and persistence of Carlyle’s sole voice. If nothing else the soundproof room raises questions about the source of the noise interfering with that voice in the raucous remainder of the house.

It is no surprise to learn that the chamber did not match Carlyle’s expectations: “The room considered as a soundless apartment may be safely pronounced an evident failure” (qtd in Kaplan, *Carlyle*, 367). The skylight leaked but provided excellent illumination “almost too much light.” As for noise, when properly sealed – something that proved difficult – it did protect against street disturbance; however, the wind entered the roof space where it howled through the baffles. Worst of all, as Jane wrote, “the cocks still crowed, and the macaw still shrieked, and Mr. C-- still stormed” (*Letters and Memorials*, vol II, 238).⁶

I have suggested that in building the soundproof room Carlyle attempted to secure a space free of the polluting worldliness of sound, noise that would otherwise interfere with his ability to hear and transcribe his own voice. Those sounds for the most part were domestic, both in the sense that they came from adjoining houses and that they

took up residence in his. But they are domestic in another sense as well. It fell to Jane to diagnose this aspect of No. 6 Cheyne Row. She did so at a party to celebrate Forster's fifty-fourth birthday. She arrived with the news that Carlyle's Edinburgh investiture speech had been a triumphant success. At some point in the evening she took Dickens aside and offered him material she felt he could develop into a novel. There were other authors at the party (Wilkie Collins for one) but Jane sought out Dickens as the apt writer to refashion her narrative. Forster records the exchange in a passage that relates Dickens's grief on learning of Jane's death shortly thereafter:

One memorable evening he had passed at my house in the interval, when he saw Mrs. Carlyle for the last time. Her sudden death followed shortly after, and near the close of April he had thus written to me from Liverpool. 'It was a terrible shock to me and poor dear Carlyle has been in my mind ever since. How often I have thought of the unfinished novel. No one now to finish it. None of the writing women come near her at all.' This was an illusion [sic] to what had passed in at their meeting. It was on the second of April, the day when Mr. Carlyle had delivered his inaugural address as Lord Rector of Edinburgh University ... She came to us flourishing a telegram in her hand, and the radiance of her enjoyment of it was upon her all the night. Among other things she gave Dickens the subject for a novel, from what she had herself observed at the outside of a house at the street; of which the various incidents were drawn from the condition of its blinds and curtains, the costumes visible at its windows, the cabs at its door, its visitors admitted or rejected, its articles of furniture delivered or carried away; and the subtle humour of it all, the truth in trifling bits of character, and the gradual progress into a half romantic interest had enchanted the skilled novelist. She was well into the second volume of her small romance when she left, being as far as her observation had taken her; but in a few days exciting incidents expected, the denouement could not be far off, and Dickens was to have it when they met again. (Forster, *Life*, 712)

In Forster's account of Jane's narrative, the house itself is fantastically articulate. The structures, the furnishings, even the disposition of drapery narrate event, fortune, and romance. It is a house where privacy is utterly extinguished, where lives are lived transparently in a thoroughly mobilized home.

Jane finds the materials for narrative romance in Carlyle's complaint against Victorian dwelling as summarised by No. 6 Cheyne Row, a house where the interior is impacted with the exterior. And, as we have seen, he spends years in effort to seal himself off from its possibilities. While Jane lived in her own raucous house and spied on her neighbour's she read the rich and raucous multi-voiced domestic narrative and recognized something distinctively Dickensian. While at Forster's party she confirmed this impression by delivering the story (back) to its purported origin. As Jane traced a feedback loop of Dickensian narrative, perhaps Carlyle's chamber attempted to fend off its noisy iteration. Carlyle sought to seal himself off from a domestic already tainted by the voices of others who haunted the walls, emanated from the hearth, echoed guiltily from the cellar and called loudly from the street. It is the centrality of the domestic to Victorian writing, particularly the work of Dickens, which presents a housing difficulty for Carlyle, a writer attentive to the solitary and heroic qualities of voice. Ironically, like many other Victorians, Carlyle's response was to utterly mobilize his home in pursuit of stillness and quiet.

In 1861 Robert Tait painted the Carlyles in their improved sitting room (Figure 1). The completed work, which goes by the rather anonymous title, “A Chelsea Interior”, lacks the narrative intent normally associated with the paintings of the domestic genre.⁷ Jane solicited Ruskin’s response to the work. In the course of two letters he outlined both his objections and a tentative remedy. In the first, he noted Jane’s susceptibility to the charge of indolence. He failed to specify what precisely she *should* be doing, but he does note that the books near her head are too colourful, “Everybody would want to know what you could have been reading.”⁸ Carlyle, however, is not mentioned at all. Indeed his invisibility appears to be a function of Jane’s indolence. The domestic routine that would given him shape as the recipient of the spectacle of ornamental pleasures – Jane at her workbox, or toying with her dog Nero, or reading the fourth volume of *Fredrick the Great* – is absent. The housebound professional writer is offered no place in this hearth scene; he is, one might argue, “a perfect solecism.” In his second letter Ruskin proposes the cure: “If [Tait] will cut three inches off the top and bottom of his picture...it will very nearly be right” (Cate, *Correspondence*, 80). Ruskin’s response is a variation on Carlyle’s; both hope to correct interior space – to calibrate it to the needs of the writer – by cutting, removing and reorganizing the floors and walls.



Figure 1: A CHELSEA INTERIOR by Robert Tait, 1857, Carlyle's House, Chelsea (The National Trust), ©NTPL/John Hammond.

Carlyle's final assault on egregious sound was political. In 1864 his name appeared alongside Tennyson, Millais, Leech, Wilkie Collins and many others as co-signatories to a letter protesting on behalf of those who are "daily interrupted, harassed, wearied, driven nearly mad by street musicians".⁹ The letter was drafted by Dickens, who the following year would complain bitterly of the interruptions caused by street musicians while he was attempting to complete *Our Mutual Friend*. "I am working like a dragon at my book, and am a terror to the household, likewise to all organs and brass bands in the quarter" (Picker, "Soundproof", 441). Although Dickens joined Michael Bass's campaign against street noise, his writing process was nevertheless wholly indebted to urban stimuli in a fashion which made his attack curious and more a question of the shared interests of the housebound professional. The product of Dickens' silence was a characteristically noisy book. By 1865, it had made its serialized way through thousands of homes where it was read aloud at the hearth. We might imagine the special gusto reserved for the voice of Boffin, the Golden Dustman in *Our Mutual Friend* who, in his own way, contributed to the din of Cheyne Row, of Chelsea, and of London itself:

But, aware at the instant of a fine opening for a point, Mr Boffin quenched that observation in this – delivered in the grisliest growling of the regular brown bear. "A pretty and hopeful picter? Mew, Quack quack, Bowwow"! (849)

Notes

¹ "The Workmen have all had to suffer a good deal from my 'eye,' which has often proved their foot rules and leads in error." Jane Welsh Carlyle, *Letters and Memorials*, vol. II, 208.

² On every one of these counts Victorian walls might be found wanting. Sarah Stickney Ellis recognised the necessity of supplementing physical walls with walls of will; a reinforcement that ruefully acknowledge4s the home's vulnerability to breach: "Not only must an appearance of outward order be kept up, but around every domestic scene there must be a strong wall of confidence, which no internal suspicion can undermine, no external enemy break through." Quoted in John Burnett, *Social History*, 197.

³ On the question of music and the sensitive male patient, Florence Nightingale takes an opposite view: "The effect of music upon the sick has been scarcely at all noticed. In fact its expensiveness, as it is now, makes any general application of it quite out of the question. I will only remark here, that wind instruments, including the human voice, and stringed instruments, capable of continuous sound, have generally a beneficent effect - while the piano-forte, with such instruments as have no continuity of sound, has just the reverse. The finest piano-forte playing will damage the sick [here, Carlyle would no doubt concur], while an air, like "Home, sweet home," or "Assisa a pie d'un salice," on the most ordinary grinding organ, will sensibly soothe them - and this quite independent of association. Nightingale, *Notes*, 57.

⁴ Retired philosopher or not, Chorley had neither read his Pascal, nor could he have been a particularly diligent reader of *The Builder*, which from 1848 onwards featured occasional commentary on relevant acoustic matters. Either source would have provided useful discussion of the role vibrating air played in the transmission of

sound. Chorley's design relied on air pockets that would have actually amplified sound.

⁵ Most likely mercurous chloride (calomel) used as a diuretic, cathartic and – although probably not for Carlyle's purposes – an antisiphylitic. See *Pharmacopoeia in Usum Noscomii Mancuniensis* (Pharmacopoeia used in Manchester Hospitals), <http://www.thornber.net/medicine/html/manpharmenc.pdf>, retrieved 21/05/10.

⁶ In late December of 1853, during an extended stay with Ashburtons, Jane was dispatched to Chelsea to bring some resolution to the Ronca problem. Carlyle had proposed the extravagant plan of buying No.6, evicting the tenants and keeping the empty house as a buffer. Jane's more practical solution was to have the Roncas bound over "under a penalty of ten pounds, and of immediate notice to quit, never to keep, or allow to be kept, fowls, macaws, or other nuisances." To this legal instrument was added the inducement of an *ex gratia* payment of five pounds. The combined effect of threat and bribe finally silenced the Ronca coops. See *Letters and Memorials*, vol.II, 239.

⁷ In his biography of Carlyle, Fred Kaplan cannot resist the opportunity to redress this absence. He writes: "Tait's A Chelsea Interior transcends all its limitations. Carlyle leans gracefully against the mantelpiece, his pipe in hand. He seems to have 'world enough and time' in this extended moment of thought and relaxation. Jane sits comfortably on a chair in the corner, as if contentedly patient, approving of the details of their life. The room, well decorated and comfortable, is uncluttered. Though there are no children, the husband and wife seem a family. Carlyle wears the dressing gown that his mother made him. There are no lines of illness or anxiety on Jane's face. And Carlyle's bearded face has enough youthful energy in it to assure the world that this writer still has the strength to add to his collected works.' Kaplan supplies the comfort and contentment of this domestic scene by reading against the grain of the painting and, more disturbingly, what he as a biographer knew of their relationship. See Kaplan, *Carlyle*, 411.

⁸ Dear Mrs Carlyle,

I like this little composition very much, but it isn't quite right nor can I suggest what would put it right I can only do as you bid me, & mention the little things which seem to me to be wrong.

1 st. Books too visible got up for colours sake & too much in Harlequinad squares. Books should always be grave in colour, especially books behind the head of an historian's wife. Everybody would want to know what you could have been reading.

2. The masses of red shawl a little too equal in weight, & buff corners of bookcase ditto.

3. Too much insistance [sic] on slender waist.

4. Angle here very awkward. Three lines should never meet in this way.

5. People will say that Mrs. Carlyle is indolent.

6. Bar of bookcase horizontal above head too conspicuous. That's all, I think. Nero will be delightful.

Ever affectionately yours,

J.Ruskin

Letter To Jane Carlyle, [c. November 1857] in Cate, (ed) *Correspondence*, 79.

⁹ Dickens's letter appeared in Michael Bass's *Street Music in the Metropolis* as a companion piece to his anti-street music parliamentary bill. For the history and

cultural significance of the bill in the battle over control of street noise, see Picker, "Soundproof", 440.

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