Jane Welsh Carlyle's Social Network and the Lexical Construction of "Home"

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The body of early scholarship on Jane Welsh Carlyle focuses, generally, on her troubled marriage and sense of propriety. Consequently, such criticism tends to take a predictable trajectory. Welsh Carlyle is variously depicted as a "domestic martyr," "tragic heroine," or "genius suppressed."[1] These characterizations, while not entirely unfounded, depend upon which of Welsh Carlyle's extant letters one reads. Welsh Carlyle, indeed, does seem to shun fame, although how much of this is pretense or bitterness is hidden behind her notorious wit. In one example of many, Welsh Carlyle writes to her husband:

> But the greatest testimony to your fame seems to me to be the fact of my photograph—the whole three, two of them very ugly . . . stuck up in Macmichael's shop-window. Did you ever hear anything so preposterous in your life? . . . But it proves the interest or curiosity you excite; for being neither a "distinguished authoress," nor "a celebrated murderess," nor an actress, nor a "Skittles" (the four classes of women promoted to shop-windows), it can only be as Mrs. Carlyle that they offer me for sale. (*CLO*: JWC to TC, 30 July 1865)

In relying upon this type of discourse as a window into her identity, early criticism depicts Welsh Carlyle as a reified image of piety, an image that she indeed fostered in *some* of her letters.

In other letters, however, Welsh Carlyle offers a portrait of herself that creates a striking contrast. In a letter to her cousin

[1] See Anne Skabarnicki, 55.

Jeannie Welsh, for example, Welsh Carlyle expresses delight in having been mistaken by "certain critics" to have authored "these Jane Eyre books." According to Welsh Carlyle, she reads *Shirley* for the sole purpose of determining "whether the new one was up to my reputation" (*CLO*: JWC to JW, 6 Nov. 1849). The possibility that she was and knew she was famous suggests that Welsh Carlyle may have cultivated more than adhered to an image of neglected piety.

More recent scholarly work has begun to take into consideration Welsh Carlyle's conflicted identity. Anne Skabarnicki, for one, argues that scholars ought to approach Welsh Carlyle's letters in the same manner as Thomas Carlyle's works: seriously and with methodological rigor. For Skabarnicki, Welsh Carlyle "invented and reinvented herself in her letters, creating a person and a fictive universe as vivid and complex as any fiction" (64). Jean Wasko also pushes against the Victorian stereotype of Welsh Carlyle as the "angel of the envelope." According to Wasko, Welsh Carlyle used the epistolary genre to construct a self that was defined in relation to others. In so doing, Welsh Carlyle embraced an identity that was fluid, fragmented, and in opposition to the masculine, autobiographical posturing embraced by her husband (11). It is also true that in the very act of sending letters, Welsh Carlyle transcended the bounds of hearth and home. Through the post, Jane Welsh Carlyle sent disembodied versions of herself. She occupied a space in which she straddled the here, the now, the nowhere, and the everywhere, similar to the way her historian husband liked to consider the present in relation to past and future, or the "confluence of two eternities." Metaphorically speaking at least, Welsh Carlyle was homeless, a kind of intellectual vagrant who used her letters to create a biography both readable and worthy of study.

Indeed, for Welsh Carlyle, home was a nebulous concept tied to writing instead of physical space. By writing, Welsh Carlyle simultaneously was home and not. Understanding this creative space challenges the pervasive connection of nineteenth-century letters with femininity and domesticity. In so doing, Welsh Carlyle's corpus and her simultaneous adherence to and manipulation of epistolary conventions offer a much more sophisticated way of perceiving her identity. On 9 October 1864, Welsh Carlyle told her sister-in-law that sleep helped her with

"reconciling [her] imagination to *Home*" (*CLO*: JWC to MCA, 9 October 1864). Welsh Carlyle's imagination also helped her to create a different kind of home, one built in letters.

Methodology

Analyses of Welsh Carlyle's letters have relied upon traditional forms of literary scholarship, namely close reading, but these texts also invite new methodologies used regularly in the digital humanities. For this study, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling was implemented to solidify the conceptual understanding of Welsh Carlyle's corpus of letters on a larger scale. The LDA model produced a set of topics that revealed recurring patterns of co-occurring words in the letters. Social Network Analysis (SNA) was then used to graph Welsh Carlyle's recipients and to connect them with the topics created with LDA. This approach increased the semantic value of the connections among the individuals and topics that form the nodes created by the SNA. Key Words in Context (KWICS) was then used to examine the words that attend a particular concept, in the case of this study, "home." KWICS concordances enable the examination of what Peter de Bolla has termed "orbital drag" (80). According to de Bolla, those words that come along with a particular conceptual key reveal the structure or contours of that concept as it is used within a given corpus of data. In this study 5 words were captured on each side of the term "home" (for a total of 11 words for each KWIC). In this way larger semantic units such as sentence and paragraph could be preserved. The goal of the approach was to see what particular invocations of the concept of home meant on a broader scale within Welsh Carlyle's letters.

Results

The results detailed in the following two sections show that Jane Welsh Carlyle used the letter as a way to enter the public sphere and conceived of home as a kind of figurative hub created by and embodied in the act of writing and sending a letter.[2]

[2] The corpus for this study consists of 7537 letters: 5909 written by Thomas Carlyle and 1628 written by Jane Welsh Carlyle. All of the letters are

Section I. Jane Welsh Carlyle's Social Network

Welsh Carlyle complicates notions of privacy, womanhood, and, especially, home. She associates writing, leaving, and sending letters with home, thereby displacing conventional notions of "home" as a physical place. Sending letters allowed Jane Welsh Carlyle to expand the bounds of what "home" meant; in sending letters and associating that activity with home, she created an expansive conception of home that consisted of a complex social network whose physical manifestations were on paper and the postal routes on which those papers traveled. By participating in a correspondence network that was predicated on an understanding of letter-writing as speech, Welsh Carlyle escaped the confines of traditional home-bound womanhood while maintaining all appearances to the contrary.

Welsh Carlyle had 125 unique recipients—people to whom Carlyle did not write —which suggests that she had a sophisticated and extensive social network independent of her husband and his social network. She sent 531 of the 1628 letters in *CLO* to these unique recipients and spoke with them on a number of different subjects.[3] Figure 1 uses the list of recipients and the subject collection terms of the *CLO* to illustrate Welsh Carlyle's social network; the line of each connection designates a letter sent to a recipient and the subject about which she communicated with them.[4] The connections between these nodes link together recipients with whom Welsh Carlyle discussed the same topic. The connective lines here are representative of more than a simple letter sent or received, however; they are visual representations of portions of a conversation and, in a way, visual metaphors for the kind of figurative travel that

available through Duke University Press, in both print and digital format. The citations and data were taken from the *Carlyle Letters Online* (*CLO*) up through Volume 41. Thanks to Brent Kinser, editor of the *CLO* and to Duke University Press for allowing us to data mine the XML files.

[3] This analysis extends only through Volume 41. Volume 42, made available after this analysis, includes letters from Jane Welsh Carlyle that have not been included.

[4] Readers of the *CSA* in its online versions published in *Literature Online* (ProQuest) and *Literary Reference Center Plus* (EBSCO) will be able to enlarge and view the figures of this study in color. For figure two, each of the topic and recipient connecting lines is represented in a different color.

letter-writing enables.[5] By sending letters, Welsh Carlyle sent virtual representations of herself across distances both great and small.

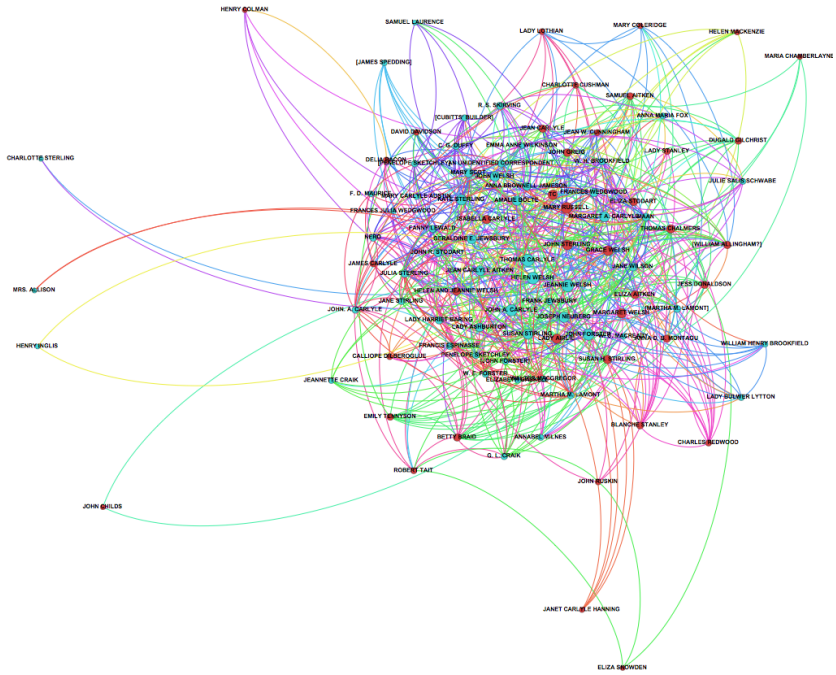

Figure 1: Jane Welsh Carlyle's Network by Subject

As the figure reveals, in her dense network, most recipients share multiple subjects or, at the least, share the same subject with many other recipients. On average, each recipient is connected through a shared subject to 35 other recipients, suggesting that Welsh Carlyle's social network—to which she relates 1007 unique topics—was comprised of relatively similar conversations to a wide circle of family and friends. It makes sense that a writer would write in the context of life's events to multiple people on similar topics. However, networks such as

[5] These graphs also represent years of editorial practices that have led to the development of the extensive list of subject-letter pairings that enabled them. That is, the graph pairs people together by subjects that the editors of the *CL* have manually generated and determined through the course of printing 41 volumes.

these reveal connections among individuals who may not have actually known each other by virtue of the topics on which they conversed with Jane Welsh Carlyle. Figure 1 visualizes the contours of Welsh Carlyle's social world. It shows the complexity of who and what it consisted of by providing an interconnected image of its collective parts.

Of greater relevance are the communities revealed by subsets of the graph. The most pertinent of these communities can be seen in Figure 2: The Cheyne Row Community. The "Cheyne Row" community diagram shows a group of correspondents with whom Welsh Carlyle communicated about her home at Number 5 Cheyne Row. An analysis of the centrality of particular recipients places Mary Russell as a focal point in Welsh Carlyle's home-centric social network (represented by the relative size of her node). In this case, Russell serves as the most central figure in this sub network because the Cheyne Row-related subjects that Welsh Carlyle discussed with her were the most diverse. Consequently, Russell functions as what is known as a hub node—as is suggested by the shape of the graph—through which other nodes are connected to each other. As a result, Russell provides a general outline of Welsh Carlyle's conversations about her home, which is not surprising given Welsh Carlyle and Russell's intimate relationship. For example, in a letter dated 30 August 1852, Welsh Carlyle writes to Russell thanking her for sending her cuttings for her garden: "I am perfectly ashamed of letting these days pass without thanking you for your kindness. It was *very* kind of you to remember these berries after I myself had forgotten them! —and to try *again* these dear little slips—surely *one* at least of them will take root with me." Both the plant and the letter serve as figurative connections with home. The nostalgic desire to preserve the presence of Scotland contrasts mightily with her response to Cheyne Row: "every bit of my own house being covered with wet paint or otherwise rendered impossible to sleep in without danger, has thrown me into a sort of fever in which I hardly *sleep at all* and cannot eat—and am in short fast going to wreck" (*CLO*: JWC to MR, 30 August 1852). Welsh Carlyle's home at Cheyne Row is a place to be gotten away from; she does so literally by planting a piece of home; she does so imaginatively by writing and sending her letter to Mary Russell.

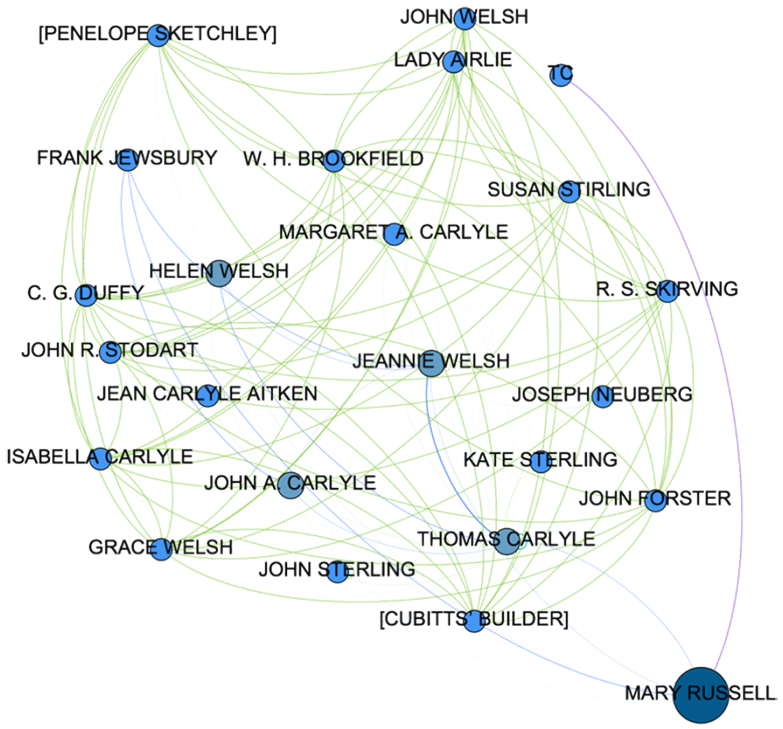

Figure: 2: The Cheyne Row Community

Welsh Carlyle's topic networks, pictured below, differ from her subject networks in that they were generated by computationally gathering topics common to her corpus rather than relying on pre-assigned editorial subject indices. Topics of interest, such as home,[6] were then connected to all letters in which that topic occurred in the top 10 results. For example, figure 3 was created by finding all letters for whom topic 3 (home, gone, write, taken, news, reading) occurred in the top 10 results for that letter.[7] The similarity of these graphs to the

[6] "Home" is an example of a name given to topic based upon a set of words relevant to the term. Topics generated by LDA modeling require the researcher to interpret to the set of words in order to label them.

[7] Topic modeling provides scores (occurrences of words) for each document that indicate the composition of the document. Each document is analyzed in terms of all 50 generated topics with the assumption that each topic makes up a percentage of that document's composition. These graphs illustrate the set of documents in which a topic is one of the top ten appearing in them.

subject network graphs suggest the validity of both automated topic modeling for this corpus and for the editorial decision-making process of assigning subjects to letters.

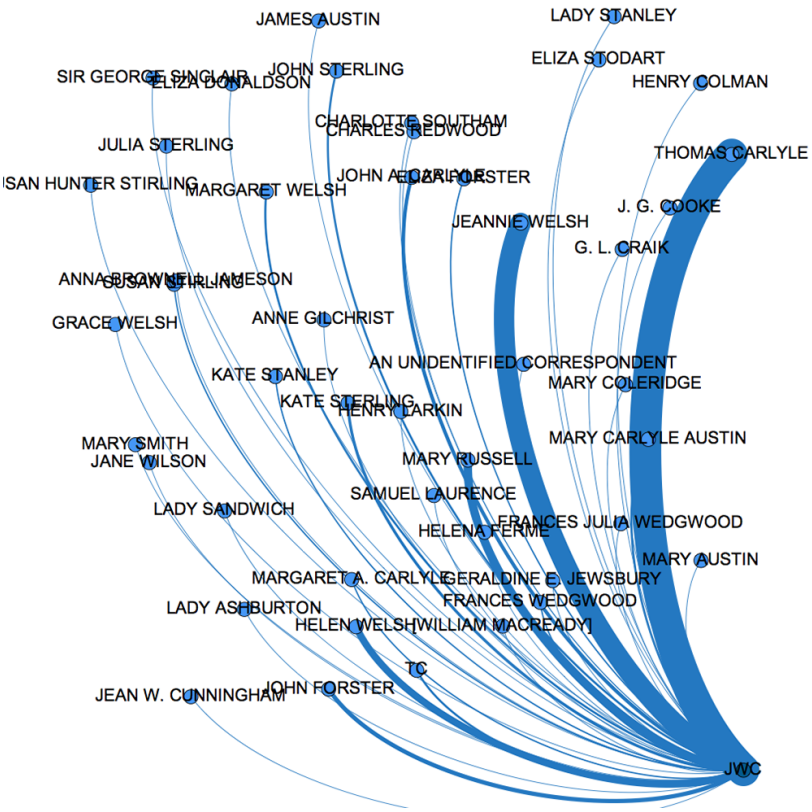

Figure 3: Topic 3 Network, "home, gone, write, taken new, reading"

Welsh Carlyle's other important topics suggest that Welsh Carlyle associated home with leaving; topic 24 (see Figure 4), for example, includes the terms "home, going, yesterday, leave, journey, left." Her subject and topic networks suggest that connection between home and departures, traveling, or journeys. For her, home seems to have functioned as a hub, a place where things originate but never remain. Welsh Carlyle's topic 12 continues to reinforce the importance of writing and its association with speech to her world; it reads: "letter, write, letters, written, woman, wrote, speak." Home, then, is

inextricably connected with writing (whether she is writing or reading) and with travel or moving away from a single, physical location.

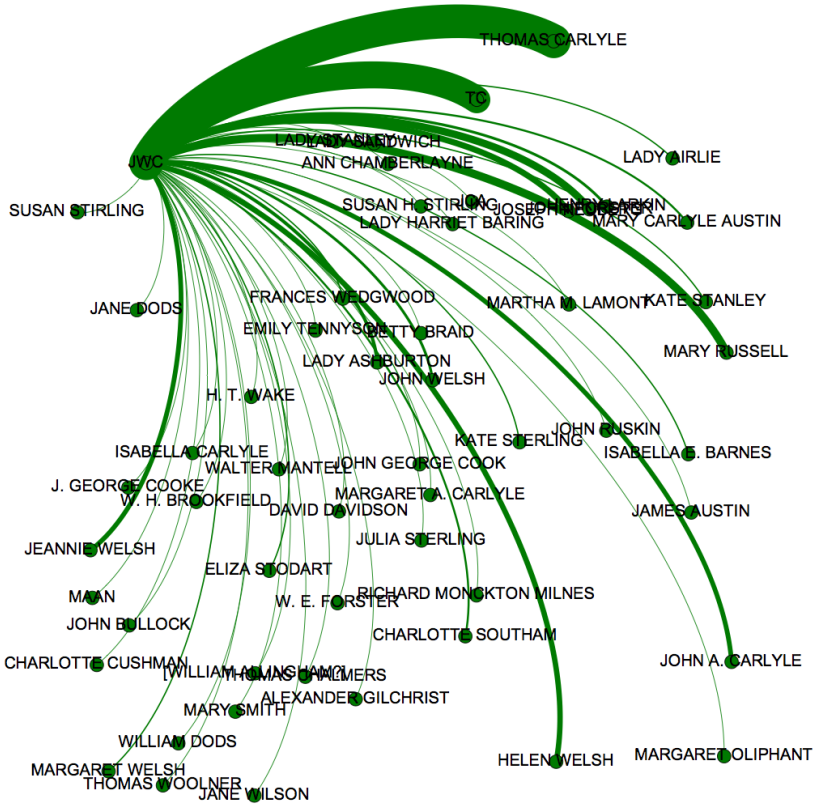

Figure 4: Topic 24, "home, going, yesterday, leave, journey, left"

Jane Welsh Carlyle's Conception of Home

An analysis of the language Welsh Carlyle used when discussing the relationship between home and writing shows that home was neither Haddington nor Cheyne Row. Instead, Welsh Carlyle locates home in the connections she created with her letters. The results of a KWIC (Key Words in Context) analysis, corroborate this theory. When Welsh Carlyle writes of "home" she writes of "going," "leaving," and, most important, of "letters" (see table below). When she writes about home, she

also writes about writing; for her, home consists of writing and sending letters and is always transitory.

Term	home	going	left	letter	write	leave	send	sent
Occur-ences	926	62	55	44	36	27	26	24

The numbers in the table indicate the number of times that the given term appears within 5 words before or after "home," which occurs 926 times. The contention of this sort of analysis is that the higher the number of concurrences, the stronger the relationship between the terms. Clearly, Welsh Carlyle often associates home very strongly with words of both outward motion (going, left, leave) and writing (letter, write, send). The strength of these relationships imply the transitory quality of Welsh Carlyle's concept of home.

Figure 5 provides another visual representation of ways that Welsh Carlyle enveloped home with words that indicate a desire to leave, to be "going," "journey[ing]," or traveling elsewhere, and also with words such as writing and letters. Figure 5 was generated by taking each term in each KWIC for each of JWC's letters and creating a directional relationship between those terms that come before the word "home" and those that come after it. It reveals, through the size of arrows toward words like "left" and "going," a predisposition on the part of Welsh Carlyle for writing about leaving home. Words such as "letter" have large arrows pointing at them from "home," which indicate that they frequently followed "home" in sentences. The directional relationship suggests that home is an originating concept for these terms. For example, letters are sent from home and one leaves home and is "going" somewhere else. The place itself becomes a secondary component of the lexical network that is simply another way to conceptualize "home."

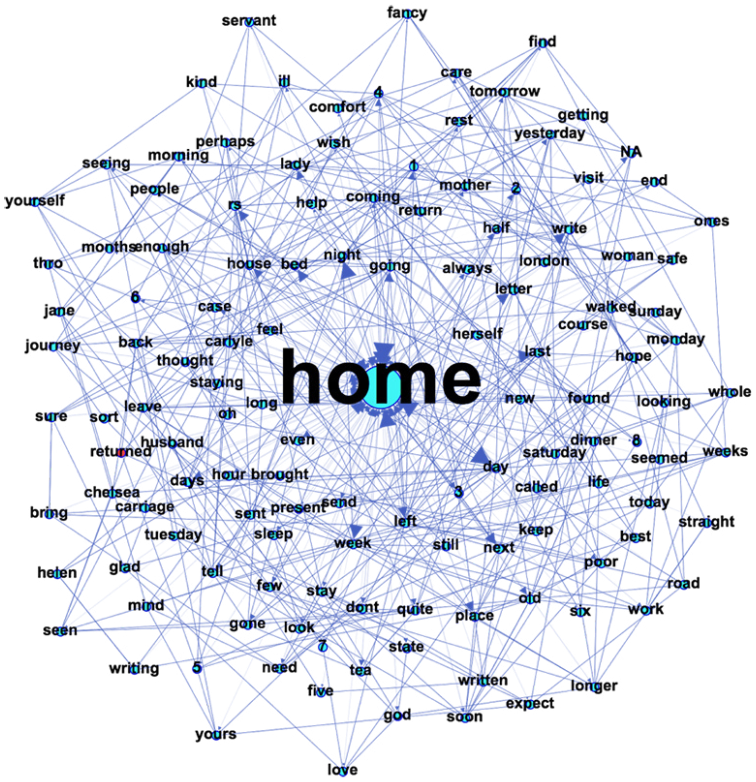

Figure 5: Welsh Carlyle's Lexical Network of "Home"

As a logical and interesting point of comparison, similar analyses devoted to Thomas Carlyle's letters reveal that his lexical network more often associates home with domesticity. According to KWICS derived from Carlyle's letters, when he writes most of "home," he writes of "tea," "mother," "Jane," and "wife." His topics also represent a rather mundane, functional, and traditional understanding of home. Carlyle's Topic 3, for example, reads: "night, day, morning, tomorrow, sleep, yesterday, home." Carlyle clearly understands "home" as a traditional one. The nineteenth-century home was consistently feminized and tied to the female body by the Victorians. Assumptions built upon gender and class were inscribed within the architecture of the home. Women's quarters were generally placed at the back of the home, away from gazing eyes and busy streets whereas men's quarters were near the front of the house

or near publicly accessible entrances.[8] The Victorian home, or at least the women's quarters, was firmly located within the private sphere.

Consequently, although Welsh Carlyle saw domesticity as inextricably tied to home, this traditional understanding of home produced unrest within her. In an October 1864 letter written to Mary Carlyle Austin, for example, Welsh Carlyle expresses her sentiments of home-as-physical-space with horror: "[I]f it were only for reconciling my imagination to *Home*—which I had to shudder at! For the rest I have been wonderfully well" (*CLO*: JWC to MCA, 9 October 1864). When Welsh Carlyle left for St. Leonard's-on-Sea in March 1864, she never thought she would return, having left "in a sort of Hearse," in fact a "sick cart." She so feared going home that she had delayed the eventuality with a journey to see her friend Mary Russell at Holmhill in Scotland. In October, she finally did return and to her relief, the only difficulty she had was being "tumbled head over heels by M*r* C rushing out into the street to meet me, in his Dressing gown and in violent agitation" (*CLO*: JWC to MCA, 9 October 1864). As she fought illness in her last years and months, home was anything but a realm of domestic bliss.

Welsh Carlyle once wrote to her friend the poet John Sterling, "A letter behoves to tell about oneself, and when oneself is disagreeable to oneself; one would rather tell about anything else" (*CLO*: JWC to JOST, 1 February 1837). Letters, for her, were a form of self-identification and self-representation. She used the letter to enter into a public, social world of her own creation. In physical terms descriptions in her letters demonstrate that she neither felt she belonged nor identified with her home, and the distinction seems to complicate distinctions between rural and urban locales. Raised only 20 miles from Edinburgh, Welsh Carlyle describes Haddington as a "tattling and illnatured place" (*CLO*: JBW to TC, 17 January 1822). Edinburgh, similarly, is filled with "dust, and bustles, and follies" (*CLO*: JBW to TC, 25 May 1822). Likewise, while at her father's farm in Templand, Welsh Carlyle complained to her suitor, Thomas: "*you* have a thousand pleasures independent of my letters; but it is very different with me—I have no pleasure in life but what your letters afford me" (*CLO*: JBW to

[8] See Lynn Walker, 825–26.

TC, 14 October 1824). At other times, Welsh Carlyle connotes her distaste for rural isolation with irony or satire. She vows to Thomas that to escape the etiquette-bound limitations of entertaining at home she would rather "turn Hermitess in some wild highland glen" (*CLO*: JBW to TC 8 January 1823). While the sentiments she expresses in her letters differ, they share a quality of restlessness and disassociation with her current location, wherever that location might be, especially when it is home. Welsh Carlyle does not feel at home because home, for both Welsh Carlyle and the readers of her letters, is a constructed, imaginative space, connected by the threads of addressee, recipient, and distance.

Through writing, Jane Welsh Carlyle claimed conceptions of home as a symbol of power that allowed her to transgress the realm of domesticity and to escape the bonds of societal expectation. Far from a "domestic martyr," she made her epistolary home at once a public and a transient space that defies summary. By using digital tools to analyze these networks it is possible to visualize the connective complexity of the world in letters that she created. They help to explain why Welsh Carlyle is so difficult to define. By using and figuring the home as a kind of imaginative hub, Welsh Carlyle publicized the home, and destabilized the privatization so often foisted upon women in the nineteenth century. She transgressed her feminine domestic role by writing and sending letters.

Rather than a "genius suppressed," Welsh Carlyle travels and circulates in a complex, distinguished social and intellectual network of letters. The diversity of subjects and people who comprise her social network speak sufficiently to the intellectual richness of the world that she constructed and navigated through writing. Rather than the more conventional vision of home that is present in Carlyle's letters, writing in Welsh Carlyle's corpus represents an empowering method for escaping the circumscription of gender, place, and rank. Writing allows her to delineate the very contours of her world and her identity. Welsh Carlyle engaged in a social world through her complex understanding of what it meant to write and send letters. By dissociating home from a solid, physical place, Welsh Carlyle becomes, in many ways, a vagrant; incessantly present and absent, journeying from one place, one topic, and one recipient, to the next.

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