



Thomas And Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage

Rosemary Ashton

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They were the most remarkable couple in London: the great sage Carlyle, with his vehement prophecies, and his witty, sardonic wife Jane. It was a strong, close, mutually admiring yet often mutually antagonistic partnership, fascinating to all who observed it. The Carlyles lived at the heart of English life in mid-Victorian London, but both were outsiders, a largely self-educated Scottish pair who took a sometimes caustic look at the society they so influenced - Carlyle through his copious writings, and both through their network of acquaintances and correspondents. Carlyle's fame was confirmed by his *Sartor Resartus* of 1843, *The French Revolution*, his lectures on heroes and hero-worship and by his radical account of contemporary industrial Britain in *Past and Present*, 1843. Both husband and wife were great letter-writers, Carlyle commenting on the matters of the day, dashing off pen portraits of those he met and Jane with her brilliant stories and her sharp, dry humour. Yet despite her brilliance, Jane suffered, especially from Carlyle's infatuation with the lion-hunting Lady Ashburton, and the tensions in their marriage grew. The letters they wrote, both to each other and to others, make theirs the most well-documented marriage of the nineteenth century and give us an unequalled portrait of a famously unhappy marriage. This moving and vivid biography describes their relationship with each other, from their first meeting in 1821 to Jane's death in 1866, and also their relationship with the world outside. Rosemary Ashton's inimitable blend of rigorous scholarship, warm sensitivity and lively wit makes this not only a portrait of a marriage but a picture of a whole age, elegant, erudite and entertaining.

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