

Jane Austen and the *Athenaeum* Again

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David Groves's article "Jane Austen and the *Athenaeum*" (*Persuasions* No. 8, 1986, pp. 58-59) very usefully revealed the existence of a hitherto overlooked anonymous piece of critical writing on the novelist published in 1831 ("Literary Women. No. II. Jane Austen," *The Athenaeum* No. 200, 27 August 1831, pp. 553-54; the first article in the series had dealt with the work of the poet Felicia Hemans [1793-1835], most remembered for her poem "Casabianca," beginning "The boy stood on the burning deck"). I may add in passing that since no English edition of any of Jane Austen's works was published between the appearance of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* late in 1817, dated 1818, and Richard Bentley's edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, No. 23 in his "Standard Novels" series, issued very late in December 1832 or early in January 1833, dated 1833, the writer of the *Athenaeum* article belongs to the small select band of critics whose opinions are based on the reading of the original or very early editions of Jane Austen's novels. It is unfortunate that praise for the writer's critical acumen must be tempered with annoyance at the article's factual errors; David Groves pointed out, at least by implication, the error "Caroline" for "Catherine," but I find also "Shawton" for "Chawton," "May" for "July" (1817) and "Musgrave" for "Musgrove."

Joanne Wilkes's article "'Without Impropriety': Maria Jane Jewsbury on Jane Austen" (*Persuasions* No. 13, 1991, pp. 33-38) added considerably to our knowledge of the *Athenaeum* article by two happy discoveries, the first being that it was written by another, if far lesser, woman writer, Maria Jane Jewsbury (1800-1833), and the second that one of the more important nineteenth-century writers on Jane Austen, George Henry Lewes, made extensive quotations from Maria Jewsbury's article in his "The Novels of Jane Austen" (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 86, 1859, pp. 99-113), where, surprisingly, Lewes attributes his quotations not to the *Athenaeum* article but to Richard Whately's review article on *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* published ten years earlier, in 1821 (*Quarterly Review* 24, pp. 352-76). It is perhaps worth pointing out that Maria Jewsbury's younger sister Geraldine (1812-1880), herself the author of six novels, from 1849 for thirty years reviewed novels for the *Athenaeum*; for fifteen or more years from 1860 she was an influential and respected reader for Jane Austen's publisher Richard Bentley, even though she did in 1865 advise Bentley not to publish Ouida's *Under Two Flags*, one of the bestsellers of the second half of

the nineteenth century (see Royal A. Gettmann, *A Victorian Publisher: a Study of the Bentley Papers*, Cambridge University Press, 1960). Geraldine, who was an intimate friend of Thomas Carlyle and his wife, seems also to have appreciated Jane Austen; at least, my copy of the 1871 second edition of James Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen* is inscribed "from Geraldine Jewsbury."

A further happy discovery enables me to reveal that George Henry Lewes was not the first to utilise Maria Jewsbury's article for his own ends without acknowledgement; not very long after the *Athenaeum* article was published, extensive quotation was made from it by none other than Jane Austen's brother Henry.

Richard Bentley's 1833 edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, already mentioned, is prefaced, pp. v-xiv, by a "Memoir of Miss Austen" by Henry Austen, described by him in a letter to Bentley dated 4 October 1832 (published by Deirdre Le Faye, "Jane Austen: New Biographical Comments," *Notes and Queries* 237, 1992, pp. 162-63) as "a biographical sketch of the Authoress which is to supersede that already published" (i.e. Henry's "Biographical Notice of the Author" published with the first edition of *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*). The "Memoir" (which is, curiously, dated 5 October 1832) is indeed the "Biographical Notice" with omissions, alterations and additions (the most notable of the last being the anecdote of Jane Austen's refusal to meet Madame de Staël). Henry seems, however, to have felt that what he could write himself was inadequate, and so, pp. x-xiv, as a tribute to his sister's memory he "subjoins the following extracts from a critical journal of the highest reputation." In his letter to Bentley of 4 October 1832 he specified that these extracts should be distinguished, as they are, by the use of inverted commas. The extracts are printed with no author's name or source in two paragraphs, the first much longer than the second; when I published my book *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* in 1982, I was able to identify the second paragraph (beginning "Miss Austen has the merit . . .") as taken in fact from Richard Whately's 1821 review article on *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* published in the *Quarterly Review*; but I could not then discover where the first paragraph had originally appeared.

I now find that the whole of this first long quoted paragraph comes in fact from Maria Jewsbury's *Athenaeum* article of 1831, in which, curiously, she herself refers to Whately's 1821 article (it is paradoxical that Lewes attributed her criticism to Whately, while Henry also borrows a paragraph from the latter). Henry's extracts thus come from two critical journals, not one: the *Athenaeum* of 1831 and the *Quarterly Review* of 1821. The passages extracted from the *Athenaeum* do not in the original form a continuous passage of text; Henry has chosen to suit his purposes the more laudatory passages

and sentences, even on occasion adding an "and" to link two pieces of text which in the original are separated by some more critical remarks. Henry also does not, as David Groves and Joanne Wilkes do not, quote the bathetic termination of Maria Jewsbury's article: "Hampshire (Miss Austen's county) still possesses a female writer richly endowed with some of her predecessor's qualifications for this species of writing, and possessing on her own account a higher faculty of imagination. We allude to Caroline Bowles." Maria Jewsbury's critical faculties would seem to have deserted her here; Caroline Bowles (1786-1854) is now remembered, if at all, as the second wife of the poet Robert Southey, while her own writings, which are in fact chiefly in verse, are forgotten. A happier termination might have been the remark, and quotation, appearing earlier in the article: "Of no woman, whose writings are as numerous and distinguished, is there perhaps so little public beyond the circle of those who knew her when alive—'A violet by a mossy stone/Half hidden from the eye' [the quotation is from Wordsworth's poem "The Lost Love"]."

NOTE

It may be worth pointing out, in connection with recent discussion of the authenticity or otherwise of what used to be described as a portrait of Jane Austen in youth by Johann Zoffany, that it is from Maria Jewsbury that Henry Austen takes the phrase "If any likeness was ever taken of her [i.e. Jane Austen] none has ever been engraved," to which he, or his publisher, adds the footnote "No likeness ever was taken of Jane Austen," while not quoting after "her" Maria Jewsbury's interjection "(and the contrary supposition would seem strange)." George Henry Lewes too in his 1859 article says "There is no portrait of her in the shop windows; indeed, no portrait of her at all" (*Jane Austen: the Critical Heritage*, edited by B. C. Southam. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 150).