

Gold and Silver Fishes in a Vase:
a Portrait of Wordsworth and Maria Jane Jewsbury

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It is a little known fact that Wordsworth had eight pet goldfish and, moreover, wrote two poems about them, the first of which was entitled 'Gold and Silver Fishes in a Vase' (1829):

Yet might your glassy prison seem
A place where joy is known,
Where golden flash and silver gleam
Have meanings of their own;
While, high and low, and all about,
Your motions, glittering Elves!
Ye weave—no danger from without,
And peace among yourselves.

How beautiful!—Yet none knows why
This ever-graceful change,
Renewed—renewed incessantly—
Within your quiet range.
Is it that ye with conscious skill
For mutual pleasure glide;
And sometimes, not without your will,
Are dwarfed, or magnified?

The fish were a gift from the poet and essayist, Maria Jane Jewsbury, and, although goldfish had been bred on the continent since the 1720s, they continued, in 1820s' England, to hold something of a rare novelty value still. So scarce were they, indeed, that these particular fish had, at Jewsbury's request, been bought by her Uncle Cookson from a dealer in Beeston, Nottingham, and then carefully transported, from there, to Rydal Mount, Kendal, over 160 miles away.

The fish were as unexpected and as pleasant a surprise for the Wordsworths as Jewsbury had hoped: '[A] private pleasure for each pair of eyes – and the most useful drawing-room companions in the world', reported Wordsworth's daughter, Dora, 'Whenever there is a pause turn to the crystal Globe, and ever-moving creatures. But cannot you tell us how they are to be fed?' she went on to ask, 'Is there no food that will not discolour the water?' (Vincent 1944: 63)¹

Maria Jane Jewsbury was born in 1800. By the time she was eighteen, her mother had died, her father's mill had become bankrupt and she had been left in charge of no less than six younger siblings, including Geraldine Jewsbury, who would grow up to become a popular novelist and the celebrated correspondent of Jane Carlyle.

By her own account, Jewsbury always wanted to be a writer. Her first

¹ Howard P. Vincent, ed. *Letters of Dora Wordsworth*. Chicago: Packard and Company, 1944

known attempt at a book proposal was sent, in 1820, to an encyclopaedia called the *Library of General Knowledge* but the proposal was, however, promptly turned down: 'I am sorry to say... that the subject on which you have pitched, is already in other hands', replied the Library's editor, George Gleig, 'Sir E. Brydges is writing for me a volume of Female Biography, into which all the distinguished authoresses of our country are introduced... Sir E. Brydges will do his volume well, but I own that I should have been better pleased to entrust it to a woman of genius' (Gillett 1932: xviii-xix)². Sir Egerton Brydges, author of *A true relation of the birth, breeding, and life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (1814) and *Censura literaria containing titles, abstracts, and opinions of old English books* (1815), was already a well-regarded expert on both female biography and reference book writing in general, and he proved to be overwhelming competition for Jewsbury, whose only publication, at that time, had been a one-page poem in the *Coventry Herald*.

Nevertheless, her regular contributions to the *Coventry Herald* and also the *Manchester Gazette* were soon spotted by writer and editor, Alaric Watts, who took it upon himself to nurture her talents. With the success of Letitia Elizabeth Landon's first collection, *The Improvisatrice* (1824), Jewsbury was soon swept up in what Germaine Greer has called the hunt for 'young, spontaneous, untutored genius' (Greer 1996: 260)³. Flushed with the early success of *The Improvisatrice*, Landon's publishers, Hurst and Robinson, were keen to add other young women writers to their list and, when Watts approached them that year with parts of Jewsbury's first book, they promptly snapped it up for £100 (Landon had received £300 for her book). Within months, the first volume of Jewsbury's two-volume miscellany of prose and verse, *Phantasmagoria; or sketches of life and literature*, was ready to go to print. A proof copy was duly dispatched to Wordsworth, to whom the miscellany had been dedicated.

On one level, at least, the dedication was simply a shrewd marketing ploy on Jewsbury's part: the public endorsement of a well-established writer had, she knew, proved crucial to the early success of many a new writer before her. Jewsbury's decision to solicit Wordsworth's attention in particular, however, might seem slightly odd at first glance; writing to solicit the attention of the ubiquitous Sir Walter Scott in 1818, the young poet, Mary Bryant (later Bedingfield), had explained that she had 'received from Mr. Wordsworth and others very soothing testimonies of the quality of some of my compositions: but', she had gone on to point out, 'it is well known that Mr. W is not popular enough to give public weight to his opinion' (Ragaz 2002: website)⁴.

By the 1820s, however, Wordsworth's popularity had grown to such an extent that he was able to give public weight to his opinion, and aspiring writers treated him accordingly. For example (and Jewsbury may well have known of this), Alaric Watts's brother-in-law, Jeremiah Holmes Wiffen, included a 'Sonnet to W. Wordsworth Esq.' in his 1820 collection of poems, *Julia Alpinala*, and had subsequently been very kindly received by Wordsworth

² Eric Gillett, ed. *Maria Jane Jewsbury, Occasional Papers, selected with a Memoir*. London: Oxford UP, 1932

³ Germaine Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet*. London: Penguin, 1996

⁴ S.A. Ragaz, 'Writing to Sir Walter: The Letters of Mary Bryan Bedingfield'. Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text 7 (Dec 2001). Online:Internet (01.02.03):<http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc07_n02.html>

(*Letters*: VIII.176)⁵. Jewsbury may have known, too, that less than a year before the publication of her own book, Alaric Watts himself had also dedicated his *Poetical Sketches* (1824) to Wordsworth. Once again, Wordsworth had replied generously: 'I must be allowed to say that I think the volume one of uncommon practice,' he wrote, 'and that some of the pieces are valuable, independent of such consideration... Let me point out the thirteenth stanza of the first poem as – with the exception of the last line but one – exactly to my taste, both in sentiment and language' (*Letters*: III.i.284).

A few years later, in 1829, Mary Bryant (by now, Mary Bedingfield) would send a copy of her novel, *Longhollow; a country tale*, to Wordsworth, deciding that his public support was worth having after all⁶. Throughout the 1830s, in fact, there would be a steady stream of books dedicated to Wordsworth, including Alexander Dyce's anthology of *Specimens of English Sonnets* (1833); Felicia Hemans's *Scenes and Hymns of Life* (1834); Robert Fletcher Housman's *A Collection of English Sonnets* (1835); and Edward Moxon's *Sonnets* (1835-7).

Much of this, however, was yet to come in 1825, and Wordsworth – often wondering then whether he had 'lived & laboured to little purpose' (Vincent 1944: 19) – was at once flattered, intrigued and a little surprised by Jewsbury's dedication: 'Yesterday I had the honor of receiving a book dedicated to my dear Self—' he told one friend, 'by a Lady, a fair one I hope, but I have never seen or heard of her before' (*Letters*: III.i.342). Given its markedly superior quality, Wordsworth preferred Jewsbury's prose to her poetry: 'I am afraid that it may give you some little pain to be told,' he wrote, 'that upon the whole, I prefer your Prose to your Verse' (Vincent 1944: 19). Nevertheless, he was distinctly impressed with *Phantasmagoria* on the whole; he admired 'the good sense, the vivacity the versatility & the ease & vigour' that he found in it, and praised Jewsbury for her 'acquaintance with the human heart & a power of the feelings from which no common things may be augured' (Vincent 1944: 20). His sister, Dorothy, also shared in his admiration and recommended *Phantasmagoria* to her friends for its 'uncommon aptitude in discerning the absurd or ridiculous in manners' (*Letters*: III.i.342). Despite his enthusiasm, however, Wordsworth felt duty-bound to give a word of caution to Jewsbury: '[L]et me caution you, who are probably young, not to rest your hopes of happiness upon Authorship', he admonished,—

I am aware that nothing can be done in literature without enthusiasm, & therefore it costs me more to write in this strain – but of even successful Authors how few have become happier Men – how few I am afraid have become better by their labours. Why should this be? & yet I cannot be but persuaded that it is so with our sex, and your's is, I think, full as much exposed to evils that beset the condition. It is obvious that you have a just sense of what female merit consists in – therefore I hope for you in a degree which I could not venture to do

⁵ 'W.W. to UNKNOWN CORRESPONDENT' (1 May 1820). Given that Wordsworth mentions an 'Elegant Sonnet...to the Author of the Excursion' and seems also to respond to the remarks about Byron in *Julia Alpinala* (1820), it is almost certain that this hitherto unattributed letter was addressed to Jeremiah Holmes Wiffen.

⁶ Wordsworth's annotated copy of *Longhollow* is lodged at the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull.

without this evidence of the depth of your feelings & the loftiness of your conception. (Vincent 1944: 20)

Nearly identical to that written to almost every aspiring writer, male or female, who approached any of the Lake Poets throughout the 1820s and 30s, the caution was well received by Jewsbury, whose *Phantasmagoria* clearly demonstrated a healthy scepticism when it came to the fundamental instability and illusoriness of the literary profession.

Eric Gillett asserts that *Phantasmagoria* is ‘clumsily-named’ (Gillett 1932: xix). Perhaps this is so but, nevertheless, the title does suggest something of the central problem that Jewsbury wishes to address in her book. On one level, Jewsbury likens her writing to the popular optical illusion devices, called ‘phantasmagoria’, that proliferated after the invention of the magic lantern at the turn of the nineteenth-century; like them, her own *Phantasmagoria* is, in part at least, a response to a public demand for whimsical, entertaining but, ultimately, innocuous novelty. At the same time, though, her title refers also to the Greek idea of ‘phantasia’, ‘a making visible’; and, at its best, *Phantasmagoria* offers a scathing critique - or ‘making visible’ - of the mechanisms that underpin the ‘life and literature’ of its subtitle. For example, in her opening essay, ‘The Age of Books’, Jewsbury forcefully delineates the nature of the literary marketplace in the 1820s:

Surely no one will deny the propriety of the distinguishing of the present age as an age of books! of book making! book reading! book reviewing! and book forgetting! ... Indeed authorship has become such a mere every day occupation, for mere everyday people, that it is rather hazardous to point out any one of your acquaintances as a person who you are sure “does not write, and has no thoughts of publishing”. Your most intimate friend, however dull, may be guilty of a statistical quarto; your youngest daughter may, unknown to you, write all the poetry for a magazine, besides having a volume of “Fragments in prose and verse” almost ready for publication. You may have a talented washerwoman quite clever at composition, and even your barber’s apprentice may be a rising genius... (Gillett 1932: 2-3)

For all her apparent disinterestedness and objectivity, though, Jewsbury was well aware that she herself was far from removed from the ‘Age of Books’ that she described: while the above allusion to the ‘youngest daughter’ who writes ‘all the poetry for a magazine’ may, in part, be a nod of acknowledgement to the likes of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Jewsbury, writing in her own ‘volume of Fragments in prose and verse’, also implicates herself in sustaining the ‘present age’.

In the same essay, Jewsbury goes on to levy heavy criticism at ‘popular authors, who, having pleased the public once, conceive they have a legitimate right to plague it as often as they choose afterwards’ (Gillett 1932: 3); she also attacks ‘disappointed writers, imitating the patient pedlar who continues to call

at your house, however frequently repulsed' (Gillett 1932: 4); but, it is new writers, like herself, who bear the brunt of her most sustained criticism, 'young authors, more in number and greater plagues than all the rest of the tribe...short-lived as motes in a sunbeam' (Gillett 1932: 4). However, as she indicates in the following sketch of the career trajectory that 'young writers' seemed destined to follow, Jewsbury does not so much resent the authors themselves as she does the society that induces them to become writers in the first instance:

A young lady or gentleman leaves school where each has been celebrated for indifferent spelling, never dotting an i, or crossing a t. Of course they are both turned out "highly accomplished", that is, the young lady paints flowers, and the gentleman plays on the German flute. But after the parties have read selections from the modern poets, a few reviews of the ancient ones, Hazlitt's Essays on Shakespeare, and all the periodicals for a twelvemonth;- after having regularly given a decided opinion on every subject, written various songs and sonnets in various Albums, and seemed rather more unreasonable than other people, - it is at length whispered abroad that Mr. So-and-so and Miss Such-an-one, are "highly gifted individuals"... Presently we hear of these highly gifted individuals writing poetry for a fashionable newspaper, and contributing the minor articles to a leading periodical; till at last, some misguided literary man takes them under his wing and presents them to some more misguided publisher as "rising geniuses", "flowers not born to blush unseen", but whom, to his everlasting renown, he is to transplant, and cherish, and so forth... Now are they puffed, and *protégéd* in all directions; till suddenly the pretty bubble bursts; a hundred faults which were before considered beauties, are discovered; they are abused for not having fulfilled the promises which their literary Godfathers and Godmothers made for them; and at last sink into their primitive insignificance; the lady to paint flowers, and the gentleman to play on the German flute. (Gillett 1932: 4-5)

The parallels in this passage with Jewsbury's own career up to 1824 are unmistakable: Jewsbury, too, wrote 'poetry for a fashionable newspaper' and contributed 'minor articles to a leading periodical'; Watts, a 'literary man', took her 'under his wing' and, in all probability, pitched her to publishers Hurst and Robinson as a 'rising genius', a flower 'not born to blush unseen'. In writing *Phantasmagoria*, Jewsbury finds herself at the midpoint of the trajectory that she so bleakly describes, that point where she is ready to be '*protégéd* in all directions', before 'the pretty bubble bursts' and she sinks into 'primitive insignificance'. Thankfully for her, though, it was precisely at this mid-point that she became firm friends with Wordsworth who, so taken was he with her work, had invited her, to spend the summer of 1825 with him and his family in the Lake District.

Jewsbury enjoyed her fortnight in the Lakes but, more importantly, she gained there a more fitting perspective on her literary work: 'I have heard an

anecdote of a young French painter which at this instant strikes me very forcibly', she wrote in a letter to Wordsworth upon her return,

"You will gain the prize for this," said his master taking up the picture which the youth had just finished – "Yes" – replied the enthusiast, at the same instant cutting the picture to pieces – "Yes – but next year I shall deserve it!" How gladly did circumstances warrant my doing so – how gladly would I imitate the young painter. My work may meet with success – how much rather would I wait, till I could claim it as my due.⁷

Wanting to deserve success, Jewsbury, began, very deliberately, to focus exclusively on the types of writing that she was good at. In October 1826, she gave up writing poetry: 'My friends make many objections but I am firm - ' she explained, 'I am tired of writing pretty verses. Admire my heroism. I really am going to read Geoffrey Chaucer'. In the same letter to Dora, Jewsbury went on to describe her new literary aspirations:

Alas, if duty and not keep [ruled] me I would take a cottage in the North, & become, not a Lake Poet, but a Lake Prose, forthwith. Hitherto my life has been a series of sacrifices so must it be to the end. I do not live for myself but against myself & for others...I think if I lived ten miles from Rydal I should never grieve again – but I should soon tire of you all.⁸

The truth, though, was that it was financial 'keep' and not 'duty' that ruled Jewsbury and, after a prolonged period of illness, she took up writing her 'pretty verses' again. 'I have lately been applied to to contribute to a juvenile Annual - ' she told Dora Wordsworth in March 1828, '...it is to contain no giants – no ghosts - & only very well behaved fairies'. Wordsworth who, in order to raise money for his son's college fees, travel expenses and furniture, was himself involved at this time in Frederick Reynolds's *Keepsake* album, approved of his protégée's actions: 'I think you do quite right in connecting yourself with these light things', he wrote,

An Author has not fair play who has no share in their profits...Therefore let the Annuals pay - and with whomsoever you deal make hard bargain. Humility with these Gentry is downright simpleness. (Vincent 1944: 51)

In fact, in January 1829, even while his own relationship with Reynolds was on the brink of collapse (Reynolds had rejected some of Wordsworth's poems and refused to pay for them), Wordsworth tried actively to persuade Reynolds to take Jewsbury on as a contributor (*Letters*: V.ii.13). Reynolds never did take her on and, by the time she visited the Wordsworths again in June 1829, Jewsbury

⁷ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to William Wordsworth', 23 July 1825, WLMS A./Jewsbury, Maria Jane/2, D.C.

⁸ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 24 October 1826, WLMS A, Jewsbury, Maria Jane, D.C.

was as much disillusioned with both the annuals and the ‘puppy-rascal’ Reynolds as Wordsworth was: “[D]earest Dora - you are in my thoughts too much, rather than too little - ’ she wrote, ‘I remember now with pleasure unalloy’d my Visit - my “monthling” - I find it hard to believe now that whilst with you I was ever sad - ever cross - ever Reynoldised’⁹. And it was shortly after this second trip that Wordsworth received his goldfish.

Jewsbury’s reply to Wordsworth’s ‘Gold and Silver Fishes in a Vase’, entitled ‘The Gold and Silver Fish to their Poet’ begins, albeit in a lighthearted way, to shed light on the shifting focus of their conversations throughout 1829:

From the great globe wherein we dwell,
And from our ocean undiminished,
Your verses, having studied well,
We do pronounce extremely fin-ished; ...
And now we’re gossiping, we & you,
(The greatest always gossip best)
Play Bard where you have quite read through,
Dear Lady Morgan, Typeland’s pest,
Will you inform us what you think
Of Mrs Jameson’s new book? -
“Loves of the Poets—” —(needn[']t shrink)
Her Ennuyée your fancy took
May it be properly admitted
Into our club? May I propose?
We hear tis elegant—brightwitted -
From the commencement to the close.
The Annuals were so full of passion
They turned our water into blood,
They really are not in our fashion,
Though very much in them was good.¹⁰

Nine years after her failed book proposal on ‘Female Biography’, Jewsbury renewed her interest in women’s writing in an attempt to see beyond strictures that she felt were placed on her by the demands of the marketplace as epitomised by the annuals. Wordsworth, ever ready to discuss Lady Morgan, Anna Jameson’s *Diary of an Ennuyée*, or the annuals, in terms of a fantasy ‘club’ of contemporary women writers, actively encouraged this new interest. In January 1829, while he was unsuccessfully negotiating a place for Jewsbury in the *Keepsake*, Wordsworth was also busy proposing another project. That month, as Dionysius Lardner began putting together *The Cabinet Cyclopaedia of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men*, Wordsworth suggested to him that at least one volume might be usefully set aside to redress the neglect of literary women. ‘The subject which I had thought of is much more limited than you suppose’, explained Wordsworth,

⁹ ‘Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth’, 10 July 1829, WLMS A, Jewsbury, Maria Jane, 22, D.C.

¹⁰ “‘The Gold and Silver Fish to their Poet’ MSS’, 9 December 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, D. C.

—being nothing more than an Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain—with an Estimate of their Works... I still am of opinion that something is wanted upon the subject – neither Dr Johnson, nor Dr Anderson, nor Chalmers, nor the Editor I believe of any other Corpus of English Poetry takes the least notice of female Writers – this, to say nothing harsher, is very ungallant. The best way of giving a comprehensive interest to the subject would be to begin with Sappho and proceed downwards through Italy antient [sic] and Modern, Spain, Germany France and England. (*Letters*: V.ii:4-5)

Lardner never took up Wordsworth's suggestion and, when the project was completed in 1849, all one hundred and thirty three volumes of the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* were exclusively devoted to assessing the lives and works of men (with the exception of a handful of entries written by Mary Shelley).

Wordsworth's proposing *An Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain* to Lardner was, most likely, a direct response to Jewsbury's renewed interest in women's writing. Although he put the proposal forward, Wordsworth never suggested that he himself ought to write the book: '[F]or myself, I could not venture to undertake the employment, two requisites being wanting - ' he told Lardner, 'Books (I mean access to Libraries) and industry to use them' (*Letters*: V.ii:4-5). It is admittedly conjecture, but a possibility nevertheless that, having tried to persuade Frederick Reynolds to take Jewsbury on as a *Keepsake* contributor, Wordsworth went on to try to land Jewsbury a book contract in which she could begin to establish a tradition of women's writing.

Ultimately, Jewsbury wouldn't need Wordsworth's assistance in finding a platform from which to establish a tradition of women's writing. In 1830, she became a reviewer for the *Athenaeum* magazine and, there, she began a series of articles, originally entitled 'Literary Sketches' but which, by the second article, had been renamed 'Literary Women'.¹¹ The first was on Felicia Hemans; the second was on Jane Austen. In the space of even the first article, though, Jewsbury discovered for herself what would eventually become the tenets of modern feminist criticism, and, in drawing upon the experiences of Hemans and Austen, began to see a way to becoming a good writer. She begins by calling for a 'feminine literary house of commons', and addresses the split between men and women writers:

It is ridiculous to compare poets who have no points in common - equally vain to settle their priority of rank: each has his own character and his own station without reference to others. There will always be a difference between the poetry of men and women - so let it be; we have two kinds of excellence instead of one; we have also the pleasure of contrast: we discover that power is the element of man's genius - beauty that of woman's; - and occasionally we reciprocate their respective influence, by discerning the beauty of power, and feeling the power of beauty. (Jewsbury 1831: 104)

¹¹ [Maria Jane Jewsbury], 'Literary Sketches', *Athenaeum* (1831), p.103-4

A hundred years after this was printed, another *Athenaeum* reviewer - Virginia Woolf - would come to the same conclusion, that 'It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men' because the 'creative power [of women] differs greatly from the creative power of men'; Woolf, too, would advocate for a kind of writing that was 'woman-manly or man-womanly', a kind of writing which, in Jewsbury's words, might discern the 'beauty of power and the power of beauty' (Woolf [1929] 1993: 56, 68)¹².

Even from this, the most cursory taste of Jewsbury's *Athenaeum* work, one begins to see how mature and sophisticated her thinking and writing had become by the early 1830s. Years of struggling proved too much for her, however: 'The world is too strong for me', she wrote, 'literary life poisons my moral being, at once by its blandishments & cares "Me this unchartered freedom tires" - '. She decided to marry:

And who is he? Nobody you ever heard me mention—none of my flirts—none of my favourites—none of my shewy, talking, talked about appendages—nobody in London—nobody who paints, or (thank Providence) who edits, or who says smart things;—but one who was a smoker but flung away cigars long before he came & asked me to think about him—who was a sloven, but is trying his very best to be one no longer—& who has promised to make a sacrifice of his present tailor & take upon in tying his cravat like a gentleman.

As she told Dora, there was, however, one final problem: '[M]y Father had set his heart on somebody very grand, forgetting that grand people do not take fancies to tradesman' daughters', she wrote,

& as he had never contemplated the possibility of "my daughter [gone?]"—arrived at thirty, thinking of setting, & being maintained instead of having to maintain herself—he has been very angry, & is now very wretched—too wretched to be reasonable... he takes refuge in lamenting how I can possibly think of leaving him—& the children—forgetting that the children have had the best of me, & that Geraldine is nearly nineteen. The purport of this letter, is partly to inquire whether when you return to Trinity Lodge your father would allow me to give my friend a letter of introduction return to Cambridge—but I believe your father's sanction & notice would do more to pacify my father any thing I know—I throw myself upon your friendship - & only beg you will write me a line directly.¹³

In this, as with everything, Wordsworth was more than happy to assist Jewsbury, and he soon persuaded her father to allow the marriage. In due course, his sister, Dorothy, was ordering silks, while he himself had a copy of his collected works prepared as a wedding present. On the 1st August 1831,

¹² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*. Ed. Michèle Barrett. London: Penguin, 1993

¹³ Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth, 24 March 1831, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

they were married by Felicia Hemans's brother in a small church in Wales.

By September 1832, Jane and William Fletcher were sailing to Bombay on board the East Indiaman *Victory*. Jewsbury quickly set to writing again; William referred to his wife's 'admirable Sea Diary' full of the sketches of characters, and descriptions of albatross-shooting, which seems to have become a popular sea-faring pastime following the publication of Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Within weeks, Jewsbury had become, as Fletcher told her father in a letter from Ceylon,

as curious & lively as a child—She is now sitting opposite to me writing I believe to her friend Miss Wordsworth—every leaf & flower she sees she longs to have and at breakfast & dinner she feeds the crows & goats. A squirrel ran past this morning—'Oh I've seen a squirrel. pretty creature. [D]o catch it for me" "Oh there's a jackal at play. Oh let me have one—that one" This will show you my dear sir that your daughter is happy...¹⁴

It was all to end too soon, however. On the 10th June 1833, she contracted cholera, 'demi-semi-cholera, only demi-semi' her journal recorded, but it proved fatal nevertheless. Jewsbury died on the 4th October and was buried at Poona.

As for the goldfish, they soon became ill and, judiciously, Wordsworth took the advice of a local villager, and transferred them from their glass vase to the pond in his garden, beneath the pollard oak tree. He marked the occasion with a second fish-poem, 'Liberty':

THOSE breathing Tokens of your kind regard,
(Suspect not, Anna, that their fate is hard;
Not soon does aught to which mild fancies cling
In lonely spots, become a slighted thing;
Those silent Inmates now no longer share,
Nor do they need, our hospitable care,
Removed in kindness from their glassy Cell
To the fresh waters of a living Well—
An elfin pool so sheltered that its rest
No winds disturb...

Jewsbury never received her copy of 'Liberty', and nor did she ever learn what happened to the fish: 'For many months they continued to prosper in their new place of abode;' recalled Wordsworth, in one of his footnotes, 'but one night by an unusually great flood they were swept out of the pool, and perished to our great regret'.

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¹⁴ 'Letter from William Fletcher to Maria Jane Jewsbury's father', 22 January 1833, English MS1320/60, John Rylands Library, Manchester.