

A Damsel in Distress: Geraldine Jewsbury and the Rhetoric of Knowledge Diffusion

David Thiele

I.

*T*he Crystal Palace rose up in the center of an epoch widely recognized by contemporaries as the most dramatic in the history of efforts to democratize knowledge. Even Ruskin, who considered it an architectural eyesore, hailed it as the first cultural institution “in which [the] whole nation is interested,” an oasis for crowds “weary of labour, yet thirsting for knowledge,” a place fertile with “noble results” that might “go on multiplying and increasing and bearing fruit seventy times seven-fold” (XII:418). Its two most prominent nicknames make a fitting pair. As “The People’s Palace,” it symbolizes Victorian faith in the power of rational recreation to ennoble the forces of democracy; as “The Crystal Palace,” it suggests a metaphor for the broader historical processes that created and surrounded this grandest of monuments to that faith. In the words of historian Geoffrey Best, mid-Victorians were “emerging from the first flush of industrialization and discovering a way of life that offered security and satisfaction,” conditions that led to “the crystallizing of a cultural apparatus providing for every level of the community” (Best 219). The semi-feudal structures of Old England had melted in the heat of rapid change. As millions of social atoms adapted to this change, a new landscape of institutional forms began to emerge, taking its shape from the fears and desires of a still-urbanizing, still-democratizing, still-industrializing society.

This same metaphor came to the mind of Geraldine Jewsbury in 1847, when she sought to contextualize one important feature of the cultural apparatus Best describes, the hundreds of Mechanics' Institutions, Athenaeums, Lyceums, and similar institutions that had been springing up around the country since the late 1820s. Searching for imagery that would stir the readers of *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* before Paxton had built the Crystal Palace or Jerrold had coined that nickname, Jewsbury declares that "From the beginning of the world there have been disorganized periods when the institutions that had heretofore held society together [...] have fallen into dissolution" and "the whole machinery of society ha[s] crystallised afresh" (365), and she attributes an absolutely crucial, epoch-shaping role in the ongoing crystallization of her own society to these less massive establishments "for the diffusion of useful knowledge." The essay in which this metaphor occurs, "The Lower Orders," was followed a few months later by a companion piece entitled "The Civilization of 'The Lower Orders,'" and the pair constitutes a striking, unique contribution to Victorian literature.

Investing such places with profound importance was not particularly unusual in itself, however. In the year of the Great Exhibition, J.W. Hudson's *History of Adult Education* summarized several bold claims that would have been familiar to Jewsbury and much of her *Shilling Magazine* audience, repeated regularly in newspaper accounts of the speeches given by institution founders and their illustrious guests. The verifiable substance behind these claims continues to be impressive: well before the iconic glass and steel of the Crystal Palace captured the national imagination, a network of local outposts for rational recreation had given the ideals of knowledge democracy the permanence of bricks and mortar, the dignity of neoclassical façades, and a central place in the new Britain. Driven by true believers in the civic civilizing mission, typically members of the liberal professions and other middle-class élites,¹ this vanguard of commoners had also transformed the landscape of cultural leadership. In Hudson's words, "[Now is] the age of philanthropy" because "The middle-classes vie with the rich in promoting the great and good work of education," and "The brightest minds in literature and science direct their talents to its development" (v). Dror Wahrman argues that

claims for the historic importance of the middle class were so frequent during this period that the famous "rise of the middle class" was really a discursive phenomenon more than anything else (356-57). As Hudson illustrates in a relatively restrained style, the discourse of knowledge diffusion is bound up with this phenomenon. Since these institutions represented the honor and influence of the middle-class *élite* that created them, aspirational assertions of their significance came as second nature. Among the many passionate supporters of their mission, even claims of epoch-shaping importance were repeated often as an act of faith or will.

The poetic language of transformation that Jewsbury associates with knowledge diffusion, in this case her image of a great crystallization, is not especially unusual in itself, either. Nor is the sweeping drama she lends it, invoking "the beginning of time" and the dissolution of "institutions that have heretofore held society together." The discourse of Victorian knowledge diffusion is dominated by inspirational prose describing the transformative, transcendent power of education for both the individual and society. Scriptural flourishes abound, including Ruskin's reference to "noble results" multiplying "seventy times seven-fold" or Disraeli's assertion that knowledge is like Jacob's ladder, "Its base rest[ing] on the primeval earth [while] its crest is lost in the shadowy splendour of the empyrean" (*M.A. Addresses* 19) – part of an 1846 speech he delivered in Jewsbury's home city of Manchester, at an Athenaeum where Hudson was secretary. Others found inspiration in the maxims of the movement. Dickens doesn't simply declare that "Knowledge is power," he exploits the full drama of an already heightened rhetoric, testifying that the best of the knowledge offered by such institutions "has a power over life and death, the body and the soul, and dominates the universe." Moved by the great and good work of the Manchester Athenaeum in 1843, he can only conclude that "the 'many-headed monster,' will soon be designated the 'many-thoughted monster!'" (*Speeches* 285, 4-5). Still others conjured souls filled with the light and peace of knowledge where previously, as William Ellery Channing puts it, "only dark, vague chaos" had dwelled, and "perhaps some violent passion, which has driven them to injurious excess" (*Self-Culture* 7).

As is often the case with inspirational rhetoric, the dominance of this theme of transformation and the imaginative zeal of its renderings reflect strategic imperatives, even doubts, as well as beliefs. Despite the utilitarian ring of “useful knowledge,” the galvanizing belief at the core of middle-class knowledge diffusion was that the holistic action of a liberal education could do for the “many-headed monster” what it had done for enlightened ruling classes going back to the Greeks:² develop, elevate, balance, and unify disparate energies. Classically, this process begins within the self and continues outward through the exercise of influence in the *polis*, a model that these liberally educated, civic-minded Victorians self-consciously emulated. *Self-Culture*, the common term that Channing takes as his title, captures the cognate belief that those élite forms of knowledge associated with liberal education constitute not just knowledge but culture, “a category that by definition transcends demagoguery, mere rhetoric, class conflict, political factionalism, and worldly self-interest or calculation,” to borrow Patrick Brantlinger’s encapsulation (96). From working-class rebellion to the middle-class philistinism Arnold would later decry in *Culture and Anarchy*, the Britain in which “institutions that have heretofore held society together [...] have fallen into dissolution” was rife with manifestations of the “dark, vague chaos,” “violent passion,” and “injurious excess” that only well guided, liberal self-culture could overcome. Regardless of the conviction that culture “transcends [...] mere rhetoric,” most of the élites who led this movement and shaped its discourse had formal training in the art of rhetoric,³ and even those who did not could see that the possibility of a Britain stabilized and unified under their ideal of enlightened citizenship depended on more than their own belief in the transformative powers of liberal education. It depended upon their ability to make uncultured others believe in the promise of a transformation in their lives as individuals, one that would be worth the requisite sacrifices.

The desperation behind the drama of this rhetoric, for Jewsbury and her fellow believers, was not entirely prompted by the state of British civilization, however. The state of the movement could be equally alarming, as its institutions displayed their own chronic instability in the face of results

that fell short of ambitions. This was especially true in Jewsbury's Manchester, where less than a decade after Benjamin Heywood opened the Mechanics' Institution with the assertion that "no soil can be more congenial to the luxurious growth of an institution like this, than our own" (Heywood, *Addresses* 14), he expressed concern that "we have not, among our subscribers, a larger portion of that class for whose benefit the Institution was more particularly intended – I mean the working class," and by 1837 he was proposing to supplement useful knowledge with "good cheap entertainment" as an enticement (*Addresses* 14, 55, 92-93). Despite efforts like Heywood's to "see if we can't make it a match for the public-house" (*Addresses* 108), Hudson reports that pubs teemed with "desultory pupils of the evening classes of the Mechanics' Institution as well as the seceders from the Athenaeum" (Hudson 140). Meanwhile, the revered powers of liberal education were degraded by "unprofitable miscellaneous lectures" that led to "a very superficial knowledge which '*The Times*' [...] has denounced as producing 'the conceit and affectation of knowledge'" (Hudson 140, x). By the 1840s, a sustained crisis of confidence in the integrity of these institutions had set in along with doubts about the viability of their mission, increasing the burden of persuasion placed on inspirational rhetoric. By 1847, the rhetorical façade of the movement was breathtaking largely because of what it concealed.

What makes Jewsbury's essays so extraordinary is the manner in which she exploits the resources of this rhetoric, not the fact that she does so; it is the manner in which she responds to this crisis of confidence, not the fact that she responds. Lacking the authority of an institution governor such as Hudson and the celebrity of an invited speaker such as Dickens, Jewsbury gained a certain freedom from the duty to movement orthodoxy that usually came with its lexicon of dramatic tropes. She uses this freedom to repurpose familiar elements of the knowledge diffuser's rhetoric, turning them to the unfamiliar task of dramatizing crisis and conflict within the movement rather than obscuring these in an effort to bolster public confidence in it. This begins with her use of crystallization as a framing metaphor in "The Lower

Orders.” Here the image suggests anything but a reassuring return to stability, much less the triumphalist confidence of the Crystal Palace. Instead, it suggests a disquieting question that informs the entire series: when “the whole machinery of society, ha[s] crystallised afresh,” will it reflect the ideals of the civilized or their failures? As Ruskin later warned, if any crystal should allow itself to become tainted, permanence would become a curse. Like “one’s heart” and unlike “one’s hands,” “The crystal must be either dirty or clean – and there’s an end of it” (XVIII:262). Jewsbury’s use of the metaphor is a call to action: eradicate impurity before crystallization is complete.

In order to do this, she suggests that one must address the sources of impurity at the primary source of Britain’s transformation as well as its pollution: the industrial North, her home. The “Lower Orders” of her title are not the poor in general but rather that economically diverse subset of the uncivilized that the civilizing institutions of her own city addressed, and which she refers to interchangeably as “the Industrial Classes,” “the New Order,” and “the new Barbarians.” Her purpose is not to undermine her readers’ belief in the ideals of the diffusion movement any more than it is to undermine the power of the iconography that conveys those ideals. As Monica Fryckstedt has noted, the affordable price point of the *Shilling Magazine* and the targeting of its advertising suggest a less-than-affluent middle-class audience keen on culture consumption and with aspirations of upward mobility (4), a strata of Victorian society that tended to be loyal to the cultural leadership of the bourgeoisie and to identify with their interests. Jewsbury’s purpose is to confront readers with a salutary struggle, a process of purification from the inside out in which she, the true believer, must break ranks to test the articles of her faith, confess and reconcile disparate convictions at war within herself, challenge movement leadership, and emerge with a vision that has the integrity as well as the grandeur to propel the civilizing mission. The resulting artifacts, these essays, offer *Shilling Magazine* readers an uncommonly candid perspective on the ideological, emotional, and rhetorical struggle to reconcile elite culture with democratic values.

II.

Jewsbury's embrace of crisis as an actuating force presents itself in intimate as well as epic imagery, continually reinforcing the idea that a moment of crisis is a moment of necessary truth. This is exemplified early on, adjacent to her crystallization metaphor, as the "new Barbarians" who threaten to shape the age surround a kind of figurative damsel in distress and her maids of honor. In a single, continuous assemblage of imagery, the barbarians "stand revealed in the rude, massive, undeveloped possibility of their brawny, sinewy, savage strength. Refinement and fastidiousness have no [...] refuge, except to curl themselves up like excruciated sensitive plants," and the body of higher learning itself – "All that for so long has been enshrouded in the learned twilight of academic bowers" – is "brought naked and unreservedly" before the barbarian horde. The visceral immediacy of this tableau conjures many things, including Burke's and Carlyle's efforts to stir readers with Marie Antoinette's fate at the hands of the Jacobin mob. Jewsbury sets the scene not in a stormed palace or *Place de la Révolution*, however, but rather "within the bare walls and glaring gas-light of the Mechanics' Institutes" ("Lower Orders" 363). The specter of the French Revolution made many appearances in pleas to increase the sponsorship of Mechanics' Institutions, yet Jewsbury's twist on the feminine personification of higher learning evokes a conflict closer to home, a conflict within knowledge diffusers whose social distinction and cultural power depended upon the relative value of their own educations. Taking one such personification as an example, this inner struggle can be summarized in simple terms: They *hoped* that the callousness and violent resentments of the barbarians would be softened by contact with Minerva, that nurturing goddess of wisdom and war who loomed beneficently in so many of their speeches and only warred with ignorance.⁴ They feared that Minerva would be sullied, could even become a kind of fallen woman in the process. The pathos of Jewsbury's gas-lit confrontation between "brawny, sinewy, savage strength" and exposed, delicate nakedness seems derived from the erotically charged terror of a gothic novel as much as anything else, adding a measure of sexual frisson to this fundamental

conflict between the urge to be promiscuous with one's cultural endowment and the urge to be protective of it.

The passage is one of several that contribute to Jewsbury's larger suggestion that the democratization of high culture should be understood within a narrative of history in which all that is sacred, mysterious, highly refined, and vaguely feminine is ravished periodically by new sources of vitality, giving birth either to a more energetic, more frank civilization or to a dark age. Her brief history of knowledge diffusion begins quietly in "old times," when "all religions and schools of philosophy had what was called 'The Secret,' viz., certain doctrines not openly professed, and into which even students and disciples were not initiated until, after severe apprenticeship, they had proven themselves worthy to be instructed." The "real sense and inspiration of [The Secret] could only be intelligible to the initiated." Later, as she tells it, the Gospel was preached to the masses but "The Secret" to which "No vulgar were admitted" was preserved by stripping "the gentility and prestige of philosophy" from common consumption of the sacred text. Finally, "it has come to be recognised that the Mass are worthy to hear all that can be taught," and it is here, in her own times, that Jewsbury's energies become divided between affirmations of the vital New Barbarian's right to education, confessions of visceral repulsion, and denunciations of movement leadership.

Foremost among the confessions is her lament that "when we descend from the Mount of Vision to the actual and practical working of the thing, and stumble amid the coarse material details, enthusiasm is well-nigh stifled with disgust" at "the irreverent ignorance, the presumption, the intense vulgarity, the coarse and clumsy attempt to meddle with high things [...] which characterises these new barbarians" ("Lower Orders" 362-64). It would be difficult to overstate the heretical significance of this sentiment, given the shortage of working-class membership Hudson and Heywood remark, and the paramount importance of that membership to the strategic objectives of the movement. Rhetorical elements less apparent than her vehement tone

create a good deal of this significance. For example, the corporate "we" of "when we descend" and passive construction of the verb phrase "is well-nigh stifled" suggest that her intensely subjective language reveals the true and perhaps universal feelings of other élites in the movement, not just her own. In connection with conventional sentiments and sanctioned views, the same rhetorical move is merely a convention of this genre and many others, an authorized expression of solidarity, a claim on bonds of sympathy that can be assumed. Here the conventional "we" and universalizing constructions make claims on the sympathy of readers that are pointedly unauthorized by the mainstream diffusion movement, and they do so in support of sentiments that have to be considered unauthorized and unconventional within a middle-class public that applauded the social vision of movement rhetoric even as confidence waned. It is a savvier gambit than it may appear at first, however. Since the *Shilling Magazine* targeted middle-class readers who aspired to the higher reaches of the bourgeoisie but had not yet scaled these heights, status anxiety among these readers and the desire to emphasize the distance between themselves and those beneath them was that much more pronounced. This status anxiety and distancing impulse are the preconditions that allow Jewsbury's "we" to connect, encouraging her appeals to visceral subjectivity and multiplying the provocative implications of her essays as critiques of the movement. These effects are visible in the most provocative aspect of her confession, its allusion to a profoundly disenchanting sexual experience. Of all the allusions Jewsbury might have employed to dramatize the communion between cultured and uncultured that was such a primary purpose of institutional knowledge diffusion, few could have challenged the male realm of movement leadership and its inspirational rhetoric so decisively. From her sense of disgust at "the actual practical working of the thing [...] the coarse material details," to the "coarse and clumsy" partner whose "intense vulgarity" further destroys the romantic fantasy, the recognizably female perspective of this allusion not only reinforces her broader gendering of culture in relation to the crude masculinity of

the New Barbarians, it also locates the damsel culture more explicitly within the civilizer's self and implicates movement rhetoric in the naïveté that leads to her distress.

In the moment, however, the source of Jewsbury's distress is the "intense vulgarity" of the barbarian and indeed the vulgarity of everything about their interaction. She invokes four distinct connotations of the word in this single description – commonness, coarseness, insolence, and obscenity – focusing on the repulsiveness of vulgarity with the intensity of a traumatic fixation. This fixation on the taint of vulgarity continues through both essays so that, taken with her gothic imagery of culture as a sacred, feminine secret exposed in a moment of bracing degradation, one might argue that the logic of psychoanalysis is the key to understanding her transformation of movement iconography. There is another logic that ties these pieces together, however: the commodity logic of social status. The same element that primarily determines value in conventional notions of feminine virtue also determines the value of élite culture, the element of exclusivity, romanticized. It was the elevated romance, the spiritual-aesthetic specialness of élite culture that elevated the psychological and ideological value of cultural capital above that of material capital in the first place. In fact, if knowledge had become a "middle-class commodity" early in the nineteenth century, as Alan Rauch has argued (14), the type of élite knowledge embraced in Jewsbury's concept of "The Secret" was already perhaps the most intensely fetishized commodity of them all. Given the gothic excess and sexualized frisson of her allusions, it is tempting to say that "The Lower Orders" anticipates Freud as well as Marx, evoking as many shades of fetishism as connotations of vulgarity. I would argue that one thing is certain: what many of Jewsbury's contemporaries would have been inclined to dismiss as the hysterical rant of an unorthodox and unmarried woman, or Jerroldian hyperbole, or even satire, is better understood as a heightened portrait of authentic inner conflict, a psychodrama designed to capture the reader with its radical, visceral candor. Her formal subject is the

crisis in knowledge diffusion, but what she elucidates is a crisis of internal dissonance that arises when the knowledge diffuser's prime fantasy, a romantic wedding of hierarchy and democracy, meets the compromising urgency of a strategic alliance with the barbarian invader.

This portrait of internal conflict is followed in "The Lower Orders" by Jewsbury's efforts to address the vulgarity and naïveté she has identified as root causes of the crisis within herself and her kind. Her approach to this task draws heavily on the biblical tropes ubiquitous in movement rhetoric. In many ways, her historical narrative of knowledge diffusion as the unveiling of an ancient and sacred "Secret" exemplifies what Patrick Joyce has referred to as the Victorian "religion of knowledge," in which "the 'holiness' of this mission might not be formally religious at all, but the effect of heightened emotion and aspiration [is] the same" and religious conceptualization as well as terminology survives the process of formal secularization (*Visions* 60). However, while Jewsbury's narrative follows the basic movement orthodoxy that elite knowledge remains sacred in the age of democracy, she radically alters the vision of liberation that Joyce identifies as the great attraction of this "religion of knowledge," a socially harmonizing blend of "Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic aspiration" (*Visions* 60). For her, the "religion of knowledge" remains strictly hierarchical, "only [...] intelligible to the initiated" and demanding of a "severe apprenticeship" to determine who is "worthy to be instructed" much less initiated. Likewise, her directives on how to foster a worthiness for instruction combine movement orthodoxy with heterodox or, in this instance, heretical modifications. If these were limited to "combat[ing] and neutralis[ing]" the barbarian's "material cares and interests [...] by the cultivation of more ideal tendencies," "poetical sympathies," "high motives," and a respect for the "invisible" ("Lower Orders" 366), her words could be those of virtually any institutional orator, but Jewsbury argues that none of this is possible without a thorough purging of the movement's governors and orators.

Not content to charge her putative allies with the dishonorable practice of "gross flattery" and "encourage[ing] a spirit of *criticism* instead

of *reverence*,” Jewsbury applies the same damning phrase that she had applied to the barbarians earlier in the piece. “An intense vulgarity is the distinguishing mark of the instruction addressed to the new order,” she writes, and according to the concept of purity she has established, vulgarization is desecration. “Nothing can be more vulgar than the tone in which [‘the Masses’] are addressed,” she writes, and “bad taste is always a sin symptomatic of something more deeply seated” (“Lower Orders” 365-67). Her reference to “something more deeply seated” seems intentionally unspecific, inviting readers to identify this unspeakable impurity for themselves as if it marks the limit of her candor. She has provided the clues, however, and these suggest that the “gross flattery” and “bad taste” vulgarizing the movement indicate a loss of integrity, which is itself symptomatic of a deeper loss, the loss of faith.

Ultimately the confessional turmoil of “The Lower Orders” authorizes the candor of this attack. Without an indomitable faith in the ideals of the movement and an uncompromising commitment to the integrity of one’s vision, Jewsbury argues, the knowledge diffuser’s rhetoric of transformation is little more than dishonest pandering. It is hucksterism rather than evangelism when the New Barbarians “are told to ‘cultivate themselves,’ to ‘seek truth’ and ‘freedom,’ and all that; but in what they consist, or *how* they should be sought, is left vague” (“Lower Orders” 366). The core of her critique is clarified further by the next sentence, which she uses not to remedy this vagueness but to lament that the barbarians “may listen in vain for a word of that inspiration which passes the understanding, burns the heart within us, and makes men greater than they know” (366-67). Whether Jewsbury chose to protect the learned mystery of “The Secret” or conceived of it as mysterious even to herself, this turn from purifying frankness to purifying faith marks the true limit of her candor because it exceeds the limitations of candor itself. Vagueness is the essence of The Secret’s symbolic power, and therefore at least as indispensable to her own rhetoric as the threat of violation she conjures to enhance that power for readers. Thus, paradoxically, Jewsbury’s confessions and denunciations

in "The Lower Orders" culminate with her suggestion that the cardinal sin of knowledge diffusion has been to replace sacred mystery with vulgar mystification.

III.

When *Shilling Magazine* readers turned to "Civilisation of 'The Lower Orders'" several months later, they were greeted by an opening passage that seems to promise a more evidence-based version of "The Lower Orders." The setting is a "Lyceum gathering in a manufacturing town of Lancashire," a Lyceum being an institution with lower dues and more emphasis on relaxation than found in a Mechanics' Institution – in other words, a place more explicitly designed to be "a match for the public-house," as Heywood put it. Rather than opening with imagery, Jewsbury opens by recounting the chairman's speech at this gathering. Though she "cannot undertake to swear to the exact words" of the chairman, their "effect" was that "the Church, which ought to direct the people, had neglected to take the lead in the movement for instructing them, [so that] the people had got ahead of her, and [...] she must now be content to follow where the people led" ("Civilisation" 443). Here was a specific example of the "gross flattery" she had decried in "The Lower Orders," hard evidence of her charge that civilizer and barbarian are both guilty of desecration by vulgarization. However, "Civilisation of 'The Lower Orders'" is not simply Jewsbury's effort to substantiate her earlier charges or elaborate on the vision of crisis she had already presented. There is a distinct change of approach as she seeks to craft an inspirational alternative, a vision for the future that addresses the sources of crisis in more positive terms.

The terminology she applies to the recipients of knowledge diffusion plays a major role in this alternative vision. Now "the extreme bad taste" of the Lyceum chairman's speech is more than vulgar capitulation to the vulgar New Barbarian, it is "eminently calculated to stunt the growth, to hinder the intellectual development, and to vulgarize the spirit of the NEW ORDER, from whose unworn vitality and

unexploited capabilities we look to see the face of the earth renewed” (“Civilisation” 443).

The first indication of a shift is in her implication that it is even possible “to vulgarize the spirit of the NEW ORDER,” which in turn implies that the barbarian spirit is not vulgar to begin with. This trend continues in dramatic fashion as Jewsbury’s earlier insistence on the intense vulgarity of the barbarians, and her assertion that they “are neither grand, nor glorious, but a huge, rude, untutored, ignorant mass; with no beauty to make them desirable or tolerable, except to the eye of Infinite Hope” (“Lower Orders” 364), gives way to a more enthusiastic embrace of Romantic primitivism. The idea that the New Barbarians “contain the germ of the next generation” (“Lower Orders” 365) remains from her earlier essay along with a tendency to associate cultural regeneration with physical regeneration, while the tone in which she describes the anxious prospect of elite culture being ravished by the New Barbarians becomes more evocative of a “They came from different worlds” bodice ripper than a gothic novel. She wants to preserve the vitality of these barbarians but remove their vulgarities. She wants them to become civilized but remain manly. She wants them to throw off “overstrained reverence ‘for their betters’” (“Civilization” 448) but submit to their natural teachers.

This wish list guides an expanded denunciation of flattery, which Jewsbury denounces for creating “a sickly air of shabby gentility over all [current movement leaders] have done, instead of the full, free, rustic humanity, full of freshness and strength, which ought to be the characteristics of the new order of men” (“Civilisation” 445). “[I]f a tone of self-glorification be encouraged in them,” she warns, those “at the present time in a state of barbarism [...] will become emasculate,” an emasculation that would render the barbarian “utterly incapable of [the] hard application and docile reverence which is essential to all who are in the condition of pupilage, and who would attain instruction of any degree of intrinsic worth” (“Civilisation” 444). Since fear of working-class violence continued to be the primary motive for middle-class knowledge

diffusion, this effort at transferring the reader's concern from the barbarism of the industrial classes to their emasculation is as counter-intuitive as her association of masculinity with "docile reverence." Nonetheless, it makes sense within the strategic framework of her larger vision, which is based on unorthodox adaptations of prominent views rather than outright rejection of them. For example, her ideal type of the improved barbarian is an adaptation of the civic and cultural goals shared by virtually all members of the bourgeoisie in Jewsbury's Manchester. Dynamism without disorder, vitality without vulgarity, civilization without effeminacy – the same list informs Gaskell's later negotiation between the Hales and Thorntons of *North and South*, reflecting a shared awareness that in the eyes of a national audience, their city was simultaneously the protagonist and antagonist of industrialism, though mostly the antagonist. Jewsbury's association of masculinity with docile reverence is adapted from another source, Carlyle. Having complained that movement leaders tell the barbarians "to 'cultivate themselves,' to 'seek truth' and 'freedom,' and all that; but in what they consist, or *how* they should be sought, is left vague," the answers she supplies in "Civilisation of 'The Lower Orders'" are largely traceable to Carlyle's dictum that true freedom and manhood lie in willing submission to worthy leaders. In other words, Jewsbury suggests that the first and most important questions to which the barbarians must be given proper answers concern *whom* they should seek in pursuit of truth, freedom, "and all that," and in what spirit. Her continued denunciation of pandering as a cause of crisis rather than a solution makes it clear that the proper answer is not to be found in faithless movement leadership or the "spirit of *criticism* instead of *reverence*" that it encourages, but in their Carlylean opposites.

Jewsbury's answer as to how barbarians should seek the benefits of culture extends the pattern, adapting Carlyle's "gospel of work" to the practice of culture consumption as a means of reconciling the fetishized, mystified value of elite knowledge with the middle-class ideal of meritocracy. "*Self-cultivation* is HARD WORK, if it is to be worth anything" ("Civilisation" 444), she writes. "There is nothing in the fact of their daily

labour to disqualify them from being *entirely civilised*” but “The industrial classes have an immense distance to make up” (“Civilisation” 448, 444). So, while Jewsbury’s vision of a New Order endowed with primal nobility creates the possibility of communion without desecration, therefore the consummation of the knowledge diffuser’s beleaguered efforts, there is another side to her vision: “before the people can enjoy practical communion of intercourse with those above them, they must be made their equals in *fact* as well as in *theory*,” which is to say, “not [...] until they become equal in refinement of manners and general instruction to those who now hold the position of their superiors” (“Civilisation” 448, 444). In some ways, Carlyle himself serves as her model for the New Order, embodying this hard-earned marriage of rough integrity, zealous faith, and higher learning. Despite the antidemocratic drift of his work, his fiery sermonizing resonates strongly with core values of middle-class knowledge diffusion while also suggesting a stark contrast with the movement rhetoric Jewsbury faults as less inspired, less honest, and less effective. The manner in which she applies his gospel of work to culture consumption is audacious because it could be discouraging, but is a rhetorical gambit with several benefits. It cements her effort to appear as progressive yet more frank than the flatterers she condemns by supplementing her earlier appeal for “inspiration which passes the understanding” with something more tangible and rigorous. The result is an inspirational form of gradualism. The Secret is removed to a safe though theoretically bridgeable distance from the vulgar masses, safeguarding the purity of elite culture and thus preserving the source of its value and allure.

As “Civilisation of ‘The Lower Orders’” draws to its conclusion, Jewsbury positions herself as a woman capable of pragmatism but more convinced than ever that she is addressing a crisis of faith. She expresses all of this in a passage calling for “something more solid and systematic than lectures and Lyceums” and calling on a new generation of heroic “MISSIONARIES” of culture (“Civilisation” 452). The aggressive capitalization of “MISSIONARIES” matches her rendering of “NEW ORDER,” emphasizing the need for missionaries who are equal to the challenge. They must be endowed with developed powers that are a match

for the massive yet "undeveloped" powers of the New Order. They must have what she sees lacking in current movement leadership, uncompromising dedication to the highest ideals and "energy and zeal, and a passionate yearning love for the multitude." They must be more than willing "to spend and be spent" in service of the sacred mission (452). The first sentence in this passage, Jewsbury's appeal for "something more solid and systematic than lectures and Lyceums," articulates the same mainstream concern about "unprofitable miscellaneous lectures" that Hudson notes in his slightly later history of the movement. Hudson's description of the result, a "very superficial knowledge which '*The Times*' [...] has denounced as producing 'the conceit and affectation of knowledge,'" is what Jewsbury denounces as "a slang of philosophical culture" in "The Lower Orders" (367). The next sentence in "Civilisation of 'The Lower Orders,'" her appeal for missionaries of culture, completes her attempt to "descend from the Mount of Vision" with a vision strong enough to survive the descent and inspire faith in others.

The sanctified gradualism of Jewsbury's "hard apprenticeship" narrative and the bodice-ripping primitivism of her regeneration narrative are the complementary elements that provide this strength. It is a vision of disparate impulses and social forces reconciled but, more remarkably, it is a vision that dramatizes the implications of democratizing one's distinguishing possession, an aspect of knowledge diffusion that movement rhetoric consistently obscured. Finally, it is the strategic form that Jewsbury gives to her own version of Carlyle's "Everlasting Yea," an assertion of faith that reaffirms the ideals of knowledge democracy without taking them for granted.

University of Mount Union

Notes

¹ R.J. Morris details the prevalence of urban élites from liberal, especially Unitarian, circles in the voluntary societies of Jewsbury's region. These include liberally educated commercial figures as well as members of the liberal professions and some representation from cultured industrialists.

² Athenaeums and other institutions intended for the under-refined middle ranks emphasized subjects associated with liberal education from their inception, while institutions founded to encourage useful scientific and technical knowledge among the working classes, including Mechanics' Institutions, quickly made a prominent place for the liberal arts as well. The Manchester Mechanics' Institution offers a typical example of the latter category. Hudson reports that the number of lectures in "Physical Science" went from 235 in 1835-39 to 88 in 1845-49, while the number of lectures in "Literature and Education" went from 53 to 84 in same period, effectively erasing the institution's foundational preference for sciences useful to industry (132). As early as 1840, the report of another Mechanics' Institute reflects this trend even more dramatically. The first four topics listed for the mutual improvement society of the Mechanics' Royal Institution concern machinery and textiles. The next two dozen concern topics such as "Whether Science or Literature has been most beneficial to society," "On the Utility of Working Men Studying the Learned Languages," "On Ancient Civilisation," "On the Study of History," "On the Influence of Novels," "On Taste," and "On the Tendency of Mental Culture to Promote Morality" (9-10). Alan Rauch is no doubt correct that "the knowledge movement is an important record of a culture's fascination with its own science and technology," but his further assertion that science and technology were "the most prominent disciplines of knowledge diffusion" (22, 2) is debatable in general and incorrect in the case of the institutions Jewsbury addresses.

³ The legal profession is especially prevalent in Victorian knowledge diffusion, though rhetoric had a place in the liberal education of those outside the liberal professions as well.

⁴ Jonathan Rose cites an excellent example of such references to Minerva, an 1852 Manchester Athenaeum document that asserts that "Minerva herself presides over its halls, its libraries and its literary entertainments; with her placid and benign countenance she invites the young men of Manchester to all her literary and scientific treasures which she spreads before them in the greatest profusion" (qtd *Intellectual Lives* 112).

Works Cited

- Best, Geoffrey. *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-1875*. London: Fontana, 1979.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Channing, William Ellery. *Self-Culture: An Address Delivered at Boston, America, September, 1838*. London: William Strange, 1838.
- Dickens, Charles. *The Speeches of Charles Dickens: A Complete Edition*. Ed. K.J. Fielding. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988.
- Fryckstedt, Monica. "Douglas Jerrold's *Shilling Magazine*." *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring 1986), 2-27.
- Heywood, Benjamin. *Addresses Delivered at the Manchester Mechanics' Institution*. London: Charles Knight and Co., 1843.
- Hudson, J.W. *The History of Adult Education*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1851.
- Jewsbury, Geraldine. "Civilisation of 'The Lower Orders.'" *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* 6 (July-December 1847), 443-52.
- . "The Lower Orders." *Shilling Magazine* 5 (January-June 1847), 362-67.
- Joyce, Patrick. *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1991.
- Manchester Athenaeum. *Addresses, 1835-1885, Also Report of the Proceedings of the meeting of the Members in Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution, October 28th, 1885*. Manchester: Directors of the Manchester Athenaeum, 1888.
- . *Report of the Proceedings Connected with the Grand Soiree of the Manchester Athenaeum, held on Thursday, October 22nd, 1846*. Manchester: 1846.
- . *Report of the Provisional Directors of the Athenaeum, and the Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting, 25th January, 1837, with the Rules, Bye-Laws, and List of Members*. Manchester: 1837.
- Manchester Mechanics' Institution. *Report of the Directors of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution. May 1828. With the Rules and Regulations of the Institution*. Manchester: 1828.

- . *Report of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, May 1829. With the Address of Sir George Philips, Bart. M.P. at the first delivery of prizes at the Inst on the 12th of January, 1829, and the proceedings on that occasion.* Manchester: 1829.
- . *Report of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution. 1840.* Manchester: 1840.
- Mechanics' Royal Institution, Salford. *Second Annual Report of the Directors of the Mechanics' Royal Institution, Salford, and the Proceedings at the General Meeting of the Members and Friends of the Institution.* Manchester: Directors of Salford MI, 1840.
- Morris, R.J. "Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis." *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1983), 95-118.
- Rauch, Alan. *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality, and the March of Intellect.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001.
- Rose, Jonathan. *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes.* New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2001.
- Ruskin, John. *The Works of John Ruskin, Library Edition.* Ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1903-1912.
- Stedman Jones, Gareth. *Languages of Class: Studies in Working-Class History 1832-1982.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Wahrman, Dror. *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain c. 1780-1840.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Vincent, David. *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography.* London: Europa Publications, 1981.

