

Chapter 2

The Making of a Bestseller: Alexander and Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Chemistry*

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Jane Marcet (1769–1858) authored several works of popular science, the foremost of these being *Conversations on Chemistry* which first appeared in Great Britain in 1806, without the author's name.¹ That it ran to sixteen British and at least 23 American editions (plus further adaptations) during Marcet's lifetime, as well as being translated into French, German, and Italian, provides some indication of the book's popular success.² The book's preface declares that *Chemistry* (as we shall refer to it hereafter) is particularly intended for a feminine readership and written by a woman who attended the public lectures of the Royal Institution and who, in order to improve her understanding and expand her learning, met frequently with a "friend" with whom she repeated all the principal practical experiments.³ Her husband, the Swiss-born physician Alexander Marcet (1770–1822), was a fellow of the Royal Society of London and a lecturer of medical chemistry at Guy's Hospital, one of the leading London teaching hospitals. Thus, many of those who have written about Jane have presumed that Alexander was the friend in question, or the most important of Jane's "friends" who contributed to the making of *Chemistry*.⁴

As a woman who successfully penetrated the masculine preserve of science and learning during the first half of the nineteenth century, Jane has attracted much interest in academic circles over the last few decades.⁵ In contrast, Alexander's contributions to *Chemistry* have remained largely unknown, although his friends and early biographers have pointed towards them. The Swiss physicist Auguste de

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la Rive (1801–1873), who was the first to write a lengthy biography of Jane, explained how Alexander, as Jane's teacher on the subject of chemistry, gave lessons that inspired her to grasp her pen.⁶ Numerous authors have studied the life and works of Jane and Alexander, but individually.⁷ As far as we know, Louis Rosenfeld is the only scholar to have analyzed the chemical work of both Alexander and Jane. However, Rosenfeld juxtaposes their different writings without addressing their collaboration.⁸

We have recently studied Alexander's surviving private notebooks which are kept in a collection of Marcet manuscripts in Switzerland.⁹ The collection was once owned by Guy de Pourtalès (1881–1941), the Swiss novelist and a great-grandson of Jane and Alexander. Extant in the collection are several entries in Alexander's notebooks pertaining to the writing of *Chemistry*, a large set of cards with his script of elementary lectures on mineral chemistry, and the manuscript of two lectures on electrochemistry. The collection, however, does *not* contain any manuscripts by Jane from the period in her life when she worked on *Chemistry*. Using Alexander's notebooks, cards, and manuscripts, we consider how *he* viewed the birth of *Chemistry*, how the project started and evolved, and how Jane and Alexander respectively contributed to the project. But, first, let us briefly introduce the couple.

Alexander Marcet was born in Geneva, Switzerland, as Alexandre Jean Gaspard Marcet, into a Huguenot family. Popular revolts broke out in the wake of the French Revolution, and in 1794 the city was gripped by a period of "Terror" during which a public tribunal issued several death sentences. Marcet was banished for five years. Deciding to make the best of a bad situation, he fled to Scotland, where he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Recently added to the medical curriculum in Glasgow and Edinburgh by the Scottish physician and chemist Joseph Black (1728–1799), chemistry was Marcet's favorite field of study. In 1797, he graduated having written his doctoral dissertation on diabetes, in which he praised chemistry as a most useful and experimental science, one that had contributed more to the advancement of medicine than sterile philosophical disputes.¹⁰

Upon completion of his studies in Edinburgh, Marcet moved to London and found employment as an intern in charitable dispensaries for the poor. He always balked at the idea of demanding payment from his patients and, as a result, did not practice private medicine. Instead, he practiced at the noted Guy's Hospital, where he also taught chemistry to medical students. Chemistry had been energized through a renaissance catalyzed by the French chemist and economist Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794).¹¹ In this context, Marcet set up a small chemical laboratory at his London home and often took apparatus along while travelling in order to carry out chemical analyses at will.

Jane Haldimand was only fifteen years old when she lost her mother and became obliged to assume maternal duties towards her brothers and sister. She took charge of all of the household's domestic affairs and played the hostess to her father's numerous receptions. In her late teens, Haldimand travelled to Italy with her father and developed a keen interest in arts, particularly in painting. She was very close to her father, Anthony Francis Haldimand (1741–1817), a Swiss-born rich banker and property developer who decided to give the same private education both to his sons

and daughters. She was her father's main assistant and lived under his roof for as long as he was alive. While such onerous responsibilities gave her great self-confidence, her role was hardly conducive to early matrimony. This may explain why Haldimand was already 31 years old when she married Marcet in 1799. The couple had two sons (one of whom died in adolescence) and two daughters. Encouraged by her husband, Jane wrote an elementary text on physics in the form of dialogues for her young sister Sarah.¹² It is an open question whether in these early unpublished dialogues the same imaginary governess Mrs B. and her pupils, Caroline and Emily, were used as later in *Chemistry*.

Jane Marcet wrote two other bestsellers using the same "conversations" format as in *Chemistry*. The first, *Conversations on Political Economy*, was aimed at popularizing the writings of leading thinkers in political economy, such as Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), Adam Smith (1723–1790), Jean-Baptiste Say (1767–1832), and Jean-Charles de Sismondi (1773–1842); it featured only Mrs B. and Caroline.¹³ Emily rejoined the ensemble in *Conversations on Natural Philosophy*, a new version of the early dialogues written for Sarah.¹⁴ In the book, Marcet included mechanics, astronomy, hydrostatics and optics, but not heat, which she treated as a chemical element, "caloric." In the preface of *Conversations on Political Economy*, she explained that the form of dialogues had been preserved in her new essay "because the questions gave the author an opportunity of introducing objections, and placing in various points of view questions and answers as they had actually occurred in her own mind."¹⁵

The idea of communicating erudite information by way of dialogues was not in itself new. Without going back to Plato and Greek antiquity, Galileo Galilei's (1564–1642) *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632) springs to mind as an example of the same genre. What is relatively new in Marcet's context is that the author and all of the participants of her three *Conversations* volumes are women. In this respect, her work differs from Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of the Worlds* (1686) and Francesco Algarotti's *Newtonianism for Ladies or a Theory of Light and Colours* (1737), both of which staged a gentlemanly savant teaching astronomy or optics to a pretty, young marchioness. These books were still popular at the turn of the eighteenth century and paved the way for Marcet's innovations in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶

Alexander Marcet's Private Notebooks

Alexander Marcet was in the habit of entering some of his activities and reflections in small private notebooks that he called his "memoranda." Most were written after his marriage and bound with red covers. Four of the volumes concern the period from January 1800 to mid 1807. The next volumes, covering the period from mid-1807 to mid-1812, are unfortunately missing.

A long and detailed entry in his private journal, written on December 7, 1805, at the completion of the printing of *Chemistry*, is provided as an Appendix at the end of the present chapter. There Alexander reflected on the respective parts played by Jane and himself in the production of the book. He recorded, “I furnished the first materials and mine was the last hand in the work,” and he added, “Yet its execution belongs entirely to the author.”¹⁸ His journal entry provides critical details about who did what and what was done in common. Our translation of the original French entry (see “[Appendix](#)”) follows.

It was during the winter of 1801:2, I believe, that the idea for the book first came to my wife. We had often talked chemistry while travelling in France. And her curiosity was enough awakened for her to desire to watch me demonstrating the principal experiments.

I wrote on cards the headings of a small course of lectures which I then read in the privacy of my own home, and more than once, she alone was my audience. After each lecture, she produced a précis of what she had learnt & I lent her my cards so that she could do this précis.

Many years before, as her sister’s teacher, she had begun the composition of a little course of physics in the form of dialogues, & the idea came to her to attempt the same thing on the elements of chemistry: an idea that I greatly encouraged. The resulting dialogues were modelled on the above-mentioned outline, & she had the opportunity one day of showing them to Mr Pictet, who happened to be in London at the time. Mr Pictet applauded, & encouraged her to persist, which she did thereafter with much patience & perseverance.

Soon I undertook the revision & while the last chapters were being written, I began the correction of the first. These corrections proved extremely laborious for me. The style of the original was most haphazard, the tone often much too familiar, & there were from time to time contrasts too striking between the ingenuity of the teacher and the puerility of the remarks of her young pupils. Her courses were hardly completed; the punctuation virtually non-existent & the details of my experiments often wrong. However, the chain of ideas & the plan of each dialogue were tolerably correct, & I was often surprised by their ingenuity. The author was at pains to go over her objections in good faith & the difficulties that had presented themselves to her mind, & more often than not I discovered my own answers, with which I was sometimes far from being satisfied.

During the same period, the author attended from time to time the lectures given at the Institution and here and there introduced some new passages, which then needed correction. After which, my wife had to re-correct my corrections, & there was no end to our discussions. From this thankless though at times amusing task, there resulted frequent little shocks of hurt pride and impatience, & my own irritable temperament provoked disputes which often caused us to regret that we had ever begun our enterprise. All in all, however, the result of this shared endeavor of some two or three years has been an exchange of thinking, a multitude of points of contact which have been useful to both of us and whose effects will extend far beyond the memory of our little quarrels.

Once all had been completed and recopied, Dr. Yelloly reread the work and indicated in pencil a number of corrections of style which almost always tended to remove passages that were too familiar.

After that we placed – with Dr. Yelloly acting as our intermediary – the work in the hands of the bookseller, who had it examined by Arthur Aikin before giving it to the printers. Aikin’s report being favourable, Longman & Co proposed to cover all risks and share their profits with the author.

Before printing I again reread the work from cover to cover & corrected the numberless corrections and interpretations that had insinuated themselves since the previous revisions. Together, my wife and I corrected the galley proofs, and C[harles] Aikin was kind enough

to read the final proofs before going to press, making occasional useful corrections.¹⁷ Printing took three months.

I have forgotten to mention that the chapter on the vegetable & that on the animal realm had been compiled by my wife from different basic texts without any prior help from me: my lessons, and the notes that I mentioned above not extending beyond the mineral domain.

As for the preface, we both produced one without consultation. Then we combined them into one of which mine furnished the greater part.

The engravings are all the work of the author apart from a few copied from other treatises. I arranged the apparatus & and she drew them from life. Lowry made some good corrections of perspective, & rendered them much more perfect than we had flattered ourselves they were. These engravings gave us less trouble, and as much amusement as any other part of the work.¹⁸

Comments

Alexander claimed that work on the book was started during the winter of 1801–1802 and that it followed actual conversations he and Jane had had during the summer of 1801 while travelling on the Continent. Perusal of the memoranda suggests, however, that as early as February 1801, he began to rehearse a short course of chemistry that he intended to read to the closed circle of his family, and as the course contained practical demonstrations, he first began practicing the procedures to ensure the regularity of the results obtained.¹⁹ He gave Jane a set of cards summarizing a basic course in chemistry, and she wrote down what she had learned in the form of dialogues. In August 1801, she had the opportunity to read some of her dialogues to the Geneva physicist Marc-Auguste Pictet (1752–1825), who was visiting the Marcets. Pictet was a co-founder and editor of the scientific section of *Bibliothèque Britannique*, a scientific and literary periodical published in Geneva and which served as a link between continental European and British science, cut off for years by the Napoleonic blockade. Alexander recorded, “My wife, not without considerable hesitation, decided to read part of her little chemistry course dialogue to [Pictet]. I had not read it myself,” Alexander added, “and we were all enchanted by it.”²⁰ Both listeners encouraged Jane to persist.

The following day, Jane accompanied Pictet and Alexander to visit the cosmopolitan American physicist, chemist and philanthropist Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753–1814), the founder of the Royal Institution. Alexander was pleased “to see [his] little schoolgirl reasoning among the erudite” and he added that “on her return, my wife appeared perfectly happy.”²¹ Notice that all this happened *before* the winter of 1801–1802, which Alexander mentioned as the probable beginning date in his memorandum entry of December 7, 1805. Whatever the reason for this discrepancy, the writing of *Chemistry* was indeed a long-lasting endeavour, possibly slowed down by Jane’s pregnancies and the birth of two sons, in 1803 and 1805.

Among the Marcet papers that once belonged to Guy de Pourtalès there is a set of 65 cards, each measuring eight by twelve cm, with the outline of a course in mineral

chemistry written both front and back in a tiny script which is probably Alexander's; the last eight cards are devoted to practical experiments. The undated cards are *not* in the form of dialogues so it is tempting to assume that these were the ones that Alexander lent to Jane. We could not decipher the entire text on the cards, but did notice that the contents of the course are similar to the sequence of the first sixteen dialogues of *Chemistry*. However, the first two London editions of *Chemistry* contain 23 dialogues. We may surmise that the first draft of the book containing only sixteen chapters was modelled on the private course given by Alexander to members of his family circle, and that with time the book was expanded to include some chapters on organic chemistry. Chapters 17–23 actually describe the principal products known at the time to occur in vegetables and in animals. Alexander in his note of 1805 specifies that Jane compiled these dialogues from different elementary texts.

The Marcets' collaboration included the process of revision and correction of Jane's manuscript, a labor intensive, almost endless process of iteration. Alexander's "irritable temperament" provoked quarrels which often caused them to regret that they had ever begun their common enterprise. Assessing their collaboration on *Chemistry*, Alexander noted, "All in all, however, the result of this shared endeavour of some two or three years has been an exchange of thinking, a multitude of points of contact which have been useful to both of us and whose effects will extend far beyond the memory of our little quarrels."²²

Alexander Marcet claimed that their close collaboration included the writing of the preface and the arrangements of the apparatus used for the practical demonstrations which figure in the engravings, arrangements that Jane had drawn for the engraver. There were minor disagreements between the Marcets. In April 1802, Alexander reflected in his diary how nothing irritated him more than his wife preaching about the observance of religious practices in which he has had little or no interest – particularly the importance of assiduous Sunday church attendance and the observation of the Sabbath.²³ A few months earlier, he had reported a first quarrel in the following words: "The other evening, my wife maintained that religion was most pertinently connected with Natural Philosophy." To the contrary, he held that such a conjunction was counterproductive: "What madness to pretend to discover in the phenomena of creation such and such particular vision of its creator or to explain his wisdom by such and such a theory, which experience will one day prove to be false."²⁴

This process of revision and correction was complicated by the fact that, in addition to the Marcets, others were also involved, such as the physician John Yelloly (1774–1842). Jane attended the public lectures that Humphry Davy (1778–1829) read at the Royal Institution and this led to new paragraphs and further corrections. Apparently, at the end of 1803, a final draft of the book was completed and sent to Yelloly for evaluation and comments, which were favorable.²⁵ Yelloly was one of the secretaries of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of London, the other being Arthur Aikin (1773–1854). Alexander Marcet was a founding member of the society, in charge of its foreign affairs. Yelloly was also instrumental in negotiating a great deal with the publisher. In 1805, he wrote a short note to Alexander: "I have

the satisfaction to acquaint you, that the report of the gentlemen to whom Mess Longman and Co submitted the Mss is so satisfactory, that they will with pleasure print it upon the terms mentioned, viz. to take the responsibility and divide the profits.”²⁶

We do not know why Jane did not wish her name to appear on the title page of *Chemistry* until the 1830s, a decade after Alexander’s death in 1822. Was it because her “friend” had contributed significantly to it? Had he other ambitions than to co-sign a popular treatise on mineral chemistry? As a matter of fact, Alexander’s own productivity was quite respectable: he published some 30 articles, mostly medical case studies and works of chemical analysis.²⁷ One of his articles describes the case of an infant whose urine turned black on contact with the air; much later it was recognized that this condition was caused by an inherited anomaly affecting protein metabolism.²⁸ Alexander also wrote one book, dealing with kidney stones, which he took many years to complete; it achieved two editions and was translated into French and German.²⁹

Conversations on Chemistry did much better. The thousand copies of the first English edition were sold out within a year. The book was constantly reissued until 1853, by which time Longman sold 19,000 copies and the profit amounted to £4,600.³⁰ The total number of copies sold may be closer to 100,000. As previously alluded to, a large number of copies were printed and sold in the United States. Susan Lindee has counted a total of 35 American editions between 1806 and 1850, including, starting in 1831, twelve editions of an unauthorized adaptation by a certain Thomas B. Jones, under the title of *New Conversations on Chemistry*.³¹ This was possible because in the United States copyright for foreign authors was only introduced in 1890 and because Marcet’s text proved to be extremely popular for the teaching of chemistry in American schools for girls. The work was translated and published for the continental European market: in Geneva in 1806 in the form of excerpts and in full in 1809, in France after the Restoration, in Germany, and in Italy.³² Jane’s later *Conversations*, dealing with *Political Economy* and *Natural Philosophy*, were published “by the author of the *Conversations on Chemistry*” and were also very successful, with seven and thirteen editions, respectively, and for *Political Economy*, translations into Dutch, French, and Spanish.³³

The “Two Lectures on Electro-Chemistry”

Our source, the Marcet collection of the Archives of Guy de Pourtalès, contains an unpublished manuscript of Alexander Marcet written in English.³⁴ “Two Lectures on Electro-Chemistry” describes the principles of chemical electrolysis and the discovery by Davy between 1807 and 1808 of two new chemical elements, potassium and sodium, which he obtained from potash and soda, respectively, hitherto thought not to be decomposable.

By 1809 this spectacular finding was already included in that year’s new English edition of *Chemistry*. In the short introductory note to this third edition, Jane Marcet

states: “as the principles of chemistry have undergone, within the last two years, some important and fundamental change by the brilliant discovery in electrochemical science, it became necessary to make considerable changes in the work.”³⁵ Actually, two dialogues, “On alkalis” and “On earths” had to be moved from Volume I (*On Simple Bodies*) of the first two editions to Volume II (*On Compound Bodies*) of the third edition of *Chemistry*. On the other hand, the third and subsequent editions contain additional material, i.e., a new dialogue “On the chemical agencies of electricity,”³⁶ and a new section in the dialogue on metals, “Of the new metals discovered by Mr H. Davy.”³⁷

Alexander’s “Two Lectures on Electro-Chemistry” are not in the form of dialogues, in contrast to Jane’s two additions to *Chemistry*, but the content and style of the two texts are sometimes so similar, that the former is a probable source of the latter. Their respective dates are compatible with this conjecture, since the “Two Lectures” are dated from May 1809 and the introductory note of the third edition of *Chemistry* is from November, 24 1809. For the purpose of comparison, we present two sets of excerpts (all originally written in English). The first gives a short account of some properties of sodium.

“Two Lectures”:

Soda, as was naturally expected, yielded to the same powers of decomposition. The experiments being conducted precisely in the same manner as in the case of potash, a metallic substance was obtained which was quite analogous in its properties to that obtained from potash, tho differing from it in some particulars. The substance, to which Mr Davy has given the name of *sodium* is rather heavier than the base of potash, tho still of a specific gravity somewhat inferior to that of water; and with regards to the point of fusion, it is about 50 degrees [Fahrenheit] higher than in the case of potash.

Chemistry:

The next substance which Mr H. Davy submitted to the influence of the Voltaic battery was Soda, the other fixed alkali, which yielded to the same powers of decomposition; from this alkali too, a metallic substance was obtained, very analogous in its properties to that which had been discovered in potash; Mr H. Davy called it SODIUM. It is rather heavier than potassium, though considerably lighter than water; it is not so easily fusible as potassium.³⁸

Our second comparison is even more suggestive, as it concludes the section on the new metals and occurs at the end of volume I of *Chemistry*.

“Two lectures”:

Thus in the course of two years and by the unparalleled exertions of, I may almost say, a single individual, we have seen the face of Chemical Science, which had continued unchanged for the last 30 years, undergo some fundamental alterations. Some of our notions and conjectures on the compound nature of certain bodies, have been confirmed; but others have been baffled by the new light which suddenly unravelled unsuspected mysteries. Thus we have the alkalis, that important class of bodies, the nature of which had evaded the researches of all former chemists, and was deemed an almost insoluble problem, suddenly yielded to a bold effort of human genius. Davy seized upon the powerful instrument which others had discovered, but which he alone knew how to use & appreciate. With this wonderful agent he brought to light bodies which the human eye never beheld & which by their union with another body, long known to the Chemists, but totally unsuspected in this combination, might have been eternally concealed under this impenetrable disguise. [...]

It is impossible in the present period, to appreciate to their full extent the consequences which science, and perhaps the arts, may derive from these discoveries, the most brilliant perhaps – with the exception of Galvani’s and the decomposition of water – that were made in Chemical Sciences. Still however we may anticipate many important results. In chemical analysis, we are now put into possession of the most powerful engine of decomposition that we ever possessed. In geology, new views are opened which will favourably operate in that obscure and difficult science. It is already proved that all the earths, & in fact the solid surface of this globe, are metallic bodies mineralized by oxygen; and as our planet appears, from Mr Cavendish’s researches, to be considerably denser, on the whole, than the surface, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the interior of our globe is a metallic mass, the surface of which has only been mineralized by the agency of the atmosphere, or of other substances containing oxygen. The eruption of volcanos, these stupendous problems of nature, admit now of an easy explanation.

Chemistry:

Thus in the course of two years, by the unparalleled exertions of a single individual, chemical science has assumed a new aspect. Bodies have been brought to light which the human eye never before beheld, and which might have remained eternally concealed under their impenetrable disguise.

It is impossible at the present period to appreciate to their full extent the consequences which science or the arts may derive from these studies; we may, however, anticipate the most important results. In chemical analysis we are now in possession of more energetic agents of decomposition than were ever before known. In geology, new views are opened, which will probably operate a revolution in that obscure and difficult science. It is already proved that all the earths, and, in fact, the solid surface of this globe, are metallic bodies mineralized by oxygen, and as our planet has been calculated to be considerable more dense upon the whole than on the surface, it is reasonable to assume that the interior part is composed of a metallic mass, the surface of which has been mineralized by the atmosphere.³⁹

The striking similarity of these expressions in “Two Lectures” and in *Chemistry* admits the existence of a direct influence of Alexander’s text on Jane’s shorter and simplified version.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we outlined the collaboration of Jane and Alexander Marcet in the successful production of *Conversations on Chemistry*. A previously little-exploited source confirms that the book was not, as is sometimes assumed, the work of Jane alone; her husband Alexander took a significant role in the work’s conception and realization. Alexander’s testimony as given in his private notebooks, Jane’s exposure to his note cards and rehearsed lectures on mineral chemistry, Jane’s use of Alexander’s “Lectures on Electro-Chemistry,” and the back-and-forth writing and rewriting they performed in producing the *Chemistry* all demonstrate an interaction between the Marcets which superseded the husband-teacher/wife-pupil relationship, achieving a complementary partnership indeed.⁴⁰ More decisive than either partner’s single contribution, the complementarity between his chemical knowledge and her popular-science writing, energized within a supportive scientific and literary circle of friends, culminated in the making of a bestseller.

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Appendix

L'impression de cet ouvrage, *Conversations on Chemistry*, vient enfin d'être achevée, & nous ne tarderons pas à savoir son sort. Quelle part ai-je dans cette publication? Cette question n'est pas aisée à répondre. J'ai fourni les premiers matériaux et j'ai donné la dernière main à l'ouvrage. Mais l'exécution appartient entièrement à l'auteur.

C'est je crois dans l'hiver 1801:2 que l'idée de cet ouvrage vint à ma femme. Nous avons souvent parlé chimie ensemble en voyageant en France. Et sa curiosité avait été assez excitée pour lui faire désirer de me voir répéter les principales expériences.

J'écrivis sur des cartes les chefs d'un petit cours que je lus en famille, & plus d'une fois, elle seule composa mon audience. Après chaque lecture elle fit un extrait de ce qu'elle avait appris, & je lui prêtai mes cartes pour faire cet extrait.

Elle avait, il y a nombre d'années en enseignant sa sœur, commencé d'écrire un petit cours de Physique en forme de dialogues, & l'idée lui vint de faire la même tentative sur les éléments de la Chimie, idée que j'encourageai beaucoup. Ces dialogues furent calqués sur l'esquisse ci-dessus mentionnée, & elle eut un jour l'occasion de montrer les premiers à Mr Pictet qui se trouvait alors à Londres. Mr Pictet applaudit, & l'encouragea à persister, ce qu'elle fit dès lors avec beaucoup de patience, & de persévérance.

J'en entrepris bientôt la révision, & pendant que les derniers chapitres s'écrivaient, je commençai à corriger les premiers. Cette correction était pour moi extrêmement laborieuse. Le stile [*sic*] était dans l'origine extrêmement négligé, le ton souvent beaucoup trop familier, & il y avait de tem[p]s en tem[p]s des contrastes trop frappants entre l'ingéniosité, & la puérilité des remarques de ses jeunes élèves. Les périodes étaient souvent à moitié achevées; la ponctuation presque nulle, & les détails d'expériences souvent fautifs. Cependant, la filiation des idées, & le plan de chaque dialogue étaient assez corrects, & m'étonnaient souvent par leur ingéniosité. L'auteur avait soin de retracer de bonne foi des objections qu'elle avait faites, & les difficultés qui s'étaient présentées à son esprit, & le plus souvent je retrouvais mes propres réponses, dont j'étais quelquefois loin d'être satisfait.

En même temps l'auteur suivait de loin en loin les lectures de l'Institution et introduisait de tem[p]s en tem[p]s quelque nouveau passage qu'il fallait ensuite corriger. Après cela, il fallait que ma femme recorreât mes corrections, & il n'y

avait pas de fin à nos discussions. De ce travail généralement ingrat, quoique parfois amusant, il résultait de fréquents petits chocs d'amour propre ou d'impatiences, & mon tempérament irritable suscitait des disputes qui nous ont fait souvent regretter de nous être livrés à l'entreprise. A tout prendre cependant, il est résulté de ce travail commun continué pendant two to three années, un échange de pensées, une multitude de points de contact qui nous ont été utiles à tous deux, & dont les bons effets s'étendront beaucoup au-delà du souvenir de nos petites querelles.

Lorsque le tout a été fini et recopié, le Dr. Yelloly a relu l'ouvrage et indiqué au crayon plusieurs corrections de stile [*sic*] qui presque toutes tendaient à supprimer des passages trop familiers.

Après cela nous avons mis, par l'intermédiaire du Dr. Yelloly, l'ouvrage entre les mains du Libraire qui l'a fait examiner par Arthur Aikin avant que de l'offrir à l'imprimeur. Le rapport d'Aikin ayant été favorable, Longman & Co ont offert de couvrir tous les risques et de partager les profits avec l'auteur.

Avant d'imprimer j'ai encore revu l'ouvrage d'un bout à l'autre, & corrigé les corrections & interprétations sans nombre qui avaient été introduites depuis les révisions précédentes. Nous avons, ma femme & moi corrigé la presse, et C. Aikin a eu la complaisance de lire les secondes presses avant l'impression et a fait de tem[p]s en tem[p]s quelques utiles corrections. L'impression a duré environ three mois.

J'ai oublié de dire que le chapitre des végétaux, & celui du règne animal ont été compilés par ma femme, de différents ouvrages élémentaires sans aucun secours préalable de moi, mes leçons et les notes que j'ai mentionnées ci-dessus ne s'étant pas étendues au-delà du règne minéral.

Quant à la préface, nous en avons chacun faite une sans nous entendre. Nous les avons ensuite fondues en une seule, dont la mienne a fourni la plus grande partie.

Les planches ont été dessinées par l'auteur et à l'exception de quelques unes qu'elle a copiées dans d'autres traités, j'ai arrangé les appareils, & elle les a dessinés d'après nature. Lowry y a fait quelques bonnes corrections de perspective, & les a rendues beaucoup plus parfaites que nous ne n[ous] en étions flattés. Ces planches nous ont donné moins de peine, & autant d'amusement qu'aucune autre partie.

Endnotes

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¹⁹ Alexander Marcet, *Memoranda*, Vol. 1, entry dated February 25, 1801, AGP.

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²³ Alexander Marcet, *Memoranda*, Vol. 2, entry dated April 12, 1802, p. 14, AGP.

²⁴ Alexander Marcet, *Memoranda*, Vol. 1, entry dated February 20, 1801, pp. 18–20, AGP.

²⁵ Crellin, “Mrs Marcet’s *Conversations on Chemistry*” (ref. 4), p. 460. Both Jane and Alexander were energized by Davy, who was both a successful scientist and a gifted disseminator of chemical knowledge; see George A. Foote, “Sir Humphry Davy and his Audience at the Royal Institution,” *Isis* 43 (1952), 6–12; Myers, “Fictionality” (ref. 16).

²⁶ Crellin, “Mrs Marcet’s *Conversations on Chemistry*” (ref. 4), p. 460. This and the previous letter of Dr. Yelloly to Alexander Marcet are kept in the Trent Collection of letters at the Duke University Medical Center.

²⁷ For the single best source providing a bibliography of Alexander Marcet’s publications, see Garrod “Alexander John Gaspard Marcet” (ref. 7), pp. 381–385.

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³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 335–347.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 343–344.

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