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THOMAS CARLYLE, THE SON OF TIME: A STUDY OF  
CARLYLE'S PERCEPTION OF HIMSELF AS ARTIST.

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, PH.D., 1978

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**THOMAS CARLYLE, THE SON OF TIME:  
A STUDY OF CARLYLE'S PERCEPTION OF  
HIMSELF AS ARTIST**

**by**

**PATRICIA OWEN**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
in English in partial fulfillment of the  
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**1978**

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## ABSTRACT

To Carlyle, certain of Goethe's fictions (Wilhelm Meister, Das Märchen) were poetic "phantasmagoria" containing images infinite in meaning, not restricted (like those in conventional allegory) to particular concepts. Sartor is his phantasmagoric fiction in which "things most heterogeneous" are symbolized; more than one key is needed to unlock its meaning. In Sartor and in "Count Cagliostro," he experimented with literary masks to express aspects of himself that otherwise seemed forbidden to him. He admired Goethe's mask of "calm spectator" in Dichtung und Wahrheit. Goethe's encouragement helped him to accept his vocation in the "Ideal Workshop" of literature. Goethe and Rousseau are significant presences in The French Revolution. The epigraphs from Goethe and other quotations provide an ironic comment on the events described. Carlyle hated lecturing because it restricted him to one mask, the benevolent sage. His portrayal of men of letters as "Half Heroes" conveys his sense of impotence in the midst of the popularity he began to enjoy after 1837, and his fear that his poetic fire was being consumed to entertain the dilettantes. The Life of Sterling is his farewell to poetry, Sterling a "son of light" who is defeated by the enemy time. Carlyle turned from the imaginative literature

of his contemporaries because it did not report the harsh truths that he, as a Son of Time, perceived. His account in Frederick the Great of how Frederick's father forced him to become a warrior-king symbolically enacts Carlyle's rejection of the poet in himself. He notes with grim irony that Frederick, the astute leader of his country, failed to perceive the coming revolution in Europe. Only "World-Poet" Goethe saw the signs.

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## Introduction

The names of four writers occur again and again in Victorian prose with a certain symbolic force: Homer and Shakespeare, Goethe and Rousseau. Homer and Shakespeare were symbolic geniuses that the nineteenth century inherited from the age of Pope and Dryden; their greatness was unquestioned, and their works reverently studied. Sometimes Byron or Wordsworth would appear among these four, but because they were near contemporaries of the Victorians, their names inevitably lacked the almost mystical aura of greatness that surrounded accepted genius. Goethe and Rousseau, however, the one safely distanced by space, the other by time, stood on a kind of eminence above the age. It is not easy to decide how much their prestige owed to their literary works, and how much to a sense the Victorians had that these men were the archetypal individuals of the time.

I wish to explore how Goethe became part of the Victorian pantheon of symbolic geniuses. To Matthew Arnold, Goethe was "the greatest critic, perhaps, that ever lived."<sup>1</sup> To Swinburne, he was, along with Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and Victor Hugo, a "supreme poet."<sup>2</sup>

Goethe was first introduced into England by a translation of Werther from the French in 1779. During the next

decade, two more translations appeared and no less than eight imitations. In Edinburgh, Henry Mackenzie read an enthusiastic paper on contemporary German drama that led directly to Sir Walter Scott's translation of Götz von Berlichingen. But it was Mme. de Stael's De l'Allemagne, published in England in 1813, that created a widespread interest in German literature, and led to a fuller knowledge of Goethe.

A number of critics, preeminently J. M. Carré, have argued that Goethe's Olympian stature in the eyes of the Victorians is due almost entirely to Carlyle. According to Carré, if it were not for Carlyle, the history of Goethe in England would hardly exist: "après Carlyle, l'influence de Goethe sur la littérature anglaise est intimement liée à l'action de Carlyle sur ses contemporains."<sup>3</sup> It was Carlyle who in 1825 hailed Goethe as "an Artist in the high and ancient meaning of the word" and proclaimed him to be "the Foreigner, at this era, who of all others . . . deserves our study and appreciation."<sup>4</sup> Carré argues that the Goethe who influenced Carlyle was largely the author of Wilhelm Meister rather than the poet or playwright, and that as a consequence the image of Goethe in England was primarily a moral one.

Carré's argument underestimates the important role played by Goethe in the development of Carlyle's conception of himself as an artist. The young Carlyle was uncertain as to what kind of writer he was going to be. He was in

turn a writer of fiction, of poetry, of biography. He aspired to be a prophetic voice. His image of Goethe changed as he himself changed. At first, Goethe was above all the author of Faust. In Sartor Resartus he proclaimed him to be a hero for the nineteenth century whose wisdom might restore meaning and value to lives paralyzed by Byronic despair. But there are a number of different aspects of Goethe in Sartor. Emery Neff pointed out that the spiritual crisis in Sartor has parallels with an important moment in Dichtung und Wahrheit.<sup>5</sup> Sartor may be variously interpreted. On the one hand, it presents a philosophy of renunciation, but on the other it describes a period of self-doubt which ends in acceptance. Sartor's climax expresses Carlyle's joyful belief in his own genius. When he wrote it, he felt that he was no longer a hack writer but one who worked with Goethe in the "Ideal Workshop" of creative literature.<sup>6</sup>

Some time in the late 1830's Carlyle's image of Goethe changed. One finds that by the time he published Heroes and Hero Worship Goethe is not among the heroic individuals who had changed history. There is even a sense that the hero as Man of Letters does not really belong in the company of the hero as Poet, Priest, or King. The image he once had of the creative artist seems to have faded from his imagination. The artistic fact had lost its magic for him. By 1851, Carlyle can write eloquently only of a failed artist, the gifted but frustrated John Sterling.

Carlyle began by hailing Goethe as an archetypal man for the nineteenth century who was at once poet, thinker and critic. Inspired by this image, he attempted to define the role of men of letters in the rapidly changing society he lived in. The range and power of Goethe's intellect encouraged him to believe that imaginative literature might play as significant a role in men's lives as it had in the past. Speaking of Goethe many years later Nietzsche wrote, "One could say that in a certain sense the nineteenth century has strived for what Goethe as a person strove for: universality in understanding and affirmation, amenability to experience of whatever kind, reckless realism, reverence for everything factual. How does it happen that the total result is not a Goethe but a chaos, a nihilistic sigh, a not knowing which way to turn, an instinct of weariness which in praxi continually tried to reach back to the eighteenth century?"<sup>7</sup>

I wish to examine with reference to Carlyle some of the questions Nietzsche raises here. To what extent did he strive for "universality in understanding and affirmation"? In what sense did his distrust of Rousseau constitute a denial of experience? To Carlyle, Goethe represented an ideal vision of Intellectual Man responding to the complexity of nineteenth century life with the authority of Moral Man and the joy of Creative Man. The history of this ideal in his work is the subject of my thesis.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Matthew Arnold, "Ecce Convertimur ad Gentes," English Literature and Irish Politics, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: Michigan Univ. Press, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>A. S. Swinburne, "Coleridge," The Complete Works, Bonchurch edition (London: Heinemann, 1925-27; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), XV, 141.

<sup>3</sup>J. M. Carré, Goethe en Angleterre (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1921), p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Carlyle, "Critical and Miscellaneous Essays," I, The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Centenary Edition, ed. H. D. Traill, 30 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896-99; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1967), p. 207. References to works in this edition, except for references to Sartor Resartus, will be made in the text using the following abbreviations:

E : Critical and Miscellaneous Essays  
 FR : The French Revolution  
 H : Heroes  
 P : Past and Present  
 S : Life of Sterling  
 Sch: Life of Schiller  
 C : Oliver Cromwell's Letters

References to Frederick the Great will be to volume number and page.

<sup>5</sup>Emery Neff, Carlyle (London: George Allen, 1932), p. 124.

<sup>6</sup>Sartor Resartus, the Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh, ed. C. F. Harrold (New York: Odyssey Press, 1937), p. 199. Hereafter references to Sartor will be made in the text in the abbreviated form of SR.

<sup>7</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 103.

## CHAPTER I

### A Would-be Poet

Most discussion of Carlyle's early years in Edinburgh has been about the effect on him of the loss of the strong religious faith of his childhood. Critics have tended to overlook another problem that troubled him at the time-- the problem of his vocation, something that continued to haunt him until he was well over forty years of age. The purpose of his university education had been to prepare him for ministry in the Church of Scotland. When it became clear that he could not pursue that vocation, he was faced with a real dilemma. What was he to do? How was he to fit himself into the society of his time?

In his first years in Edinburgh he made a bare living as a hack writer, supplying articles for encyclopedias, and writing book reviews for a number of periodicals. But this work did not satisfy a strong ambition that he could not articulate. He knew he possessed powers of thought and expression, but he could not determine how they should be used. Was he to be a poet? Or a novelist? He wrote some poems, and he tried to persuade Jane Welsh to join him in writing a novel. He knew he had a book in him, but he did not know what kind of book it was.

Carlyle's difficulty in deciding what kind of writer he should become was complicated by prejudices he had against the men of letters of the time. When Byron died in 1824, he and Jane were deeply shocked by the news. It brought home to Carlyle the possibility that one might die with one's promise unfulfilled. That same year he visited London for the first time, and his letters to Jane show how disillusioned he was by the literary men he met there. "'Good heavens!' I often inwardly exclaim, 'and is this the literary world?'" He learned that De Quincey was living on the verge of starvation, and that Hazlitt, also desperately poor, was well known in the "ginshops." Thomas Campbell, whose poems Carlyle knew and admired, "exists in London, as most Scotchmen do, like a shrub disrooted"; Coleridge, the leading intellect of the day, was "sunk inextricably in the depths of putrescent indolence."<sup>1</sup>

Disenchanted with this glimpse of intellectual life in the city, Carlyle resolved to work in solitary independence. He persuaded the sociable Jane to live with him on an isolated farm in circumstances not all that different from those of his hard-working parents. He had no fear of being cut off from the intellectual world; what he was afraid of was of losing touch with the sane life of ordinary men. In the letter in which he first proposed marriage to Jane, he wrote, "This literature which both of us are so bent on pursuing, will not constitute the sole nourishment of any true human spirit . . . Literature is the wine of

life, it will not, cannot be its food."<sup>2</sup> He argued that the literary life they enjoyed was not enough; it tended to alienate them from the "common blessedness" of ordinary existence, the ordinary responsibilities of marriage and forming a household. The lives of Byron and Campbell represented extremes which were clearly to be avoided. Byron's restless journeyings had ended in early death. Campbell's move away from Scotland to the cosmopolitan world of London had done his poetry little good.

Carlyle's persistent ill health made him aware that there was a physical penalty to be paid for a steady diet of reading and study. He wanted to live a healthy life in a place far from those temptations of the sophisticated city that Coleridge's debility and Hazlitt's drunkenness had all too dramatically demonstrated. It was important to be a man before being a writer, he told Jane, and so he persuaded her to marry him and to live on a small farm which his brother Alick would manage. In this way they would learn "what it is to live . . . and become citizens of the world."<sup>3</sup>

In trying to shape a career as a writer, Carlyle was not influenced only by his knowledge of English and Scottish literary life. Thanks to his friend Edward Irving, he had read a good deal of French literature. The lives of Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire provided him with food for thought. These French writers had achieved a prestige in their native land such as no Englishman since Samuel Johnson had had. But Carlyle was instinctively hostile to the

philosophers of the French enlightenment. His essay on Diderot shows his eagerness to debunk Diderot's reputation as a man of influence; Voltaire he dismissed as "a great Persifleur; a man for whom life, and all that pertains to it, has, at best, but a despicable meaning" (E, I, 426).

In De l'Allemagne, Mme. de Stael defined persiflage as "une sorte de scepticisme moqueur dont la base est la métaphysique qui attribue toutes nos idées a nos sensations." Voltaire's Candide, she wrote, "présente la nature humaine sous le plus déplorable aspect, et nous offre pour toute consolation, le rire sardonique qui nous affranchit de pitié envers les autres, en nous y faisait renoncer pour nous-mêmes." She calls Voltaire "persifleur et cynique."<sup>4</sup> Carlyle too hated the sardonic smile of the skeptic. With only one of the philosophes did he feel some sympathy, and that was with Jean Jacques Rousseau. His interest in Rousseau at this time was great enough to worry Edward Irving, who was disturbed to learn that not only was Carlyle encouraging Jane to read Byron, but he was also exposing her to the dangerous knowledge of the writer he labelled "your Rousseau."<sup>5</sup>

What Carlyle failed to find in England, or in France, he discovered in Germany. Mme. de Stael's De l'Allemagne, which he read in 1817, introduced him to some brilliant writers whose lives seemed to be worthy counterparts to their works. These new writers had appeared in a country until then not distinguished by its literature. His first

enthusiasm seems to have been for Schiller, whom he urged Jane to read in 1821.<sup>6</sup> Then he discovered Goethe. It was not the author of Werther, however, who excited him, but the man who had written Faust. In Goethe he found what he had unconsciously been looking for, the great man of his time. And Goethe was a poet.

The culture of the European enlightenment tended to stress the dichotomy between the man of feeling and the man of reason. In De l'Allemagne, Mme. de Stael argued that Voltaire's Universal History, like the materialist philosophy which inspired it, encouraged a mocking indifference towards ideas which could not be rationally accounted for in terms of sensation.<sup>7</sup> Stael made Voltaire a symbol of the rationalists' mockery of religion and feeling. Carlyle's essays on Diderot and Voltaire argue that the French were superficial, and not worth serious consideration as writers. He especially deplored Voltaire's "levity," and it was probably this association of contemporary skepticism with the French writers' mockery of religion that led him to make a virtue of earnestness (E, I, 411).

Earnestness was not the theme of Carlyle's first enthusiastic essay on German poetry, however. Writing a review of Retsch's engravings for Faust, he seized the opportunity to talk about the great poet he had discovered. His ardent response to the beauty of Goethe's poetry is a revelation to those who know his later cynical remarks about literature. His pleasure in the verse itself, in its

"expressive rhythm," is unmistakable, and shows that the young Carlyle enjoyed poetry. He responded to the gaiety and exuberance of Goethe's imagination. The peculiar merit he discovered in Faust, however, was that it represented "a singular union of enthusiasm with derision."<sup>8</sup> He had found a poetry that united the seemingly antithetical qualities of feeling and intellect.

For Carlyle, at this time, there were two main "propensities" in human nature, an instinct to admire, and an instinct to despise. The self was divided between the need to affirm and the need to criticize. The first instinct was from the heart; but the second instinct smiled at what the heart affirmed. In Goethe's poetic drama he found these two psychological states brilliantly dramatized. In the opposing characters of Faust and Mephistopheles he saw the contradictions of his own nature--Goethe gave them shape and form, and brought them to a confrontation.<sup>9</sup>

In his own inner conflict between mind and heart, Carlyle was more afraid of mind. His intellect had been trained by the great thinkers of the English enlightenment, Gibbon and Hume: Hume had made him skeptical of what man could know, Gibbon had made him doubt what he had once believed. Faust excited him because it embodied, and then exorcised, the demon of the mind--the mocking spirit that derided what the heart knew. Carlyle's satirical wit had led his university friends to compare him to Swift. His instinct for satire is seen in his 1822 translation of

Faust's curse, in which he cries out against the illusions of love and ambition that make men hopeful. This early translation is almost Byronic in feeling, especially in its passionate rejection of stoicism:

A curse on juice of grapes deceiving  
On Love's wild thrill of raptures first!  
A curse on hoping, on believing!  
And patience more than all be cursed!<sup>10</sup>

Carlyle told Goethe there had been a time in his life when "Faust's wild curse seemed the only fit greeting for human life."<sup>11</sup>

The ambition of Goethe's Faust to "feel as well as understand"<sup>12</sup> spoke strongly to the Romantic in Carlyle, the Romantic eager to explore his own sensibility. Faust was a great poem to him because it delineated "whatever is wildest and most mysterious in the heart and the intellect of man."<sup>13</sup>

To friends like Francis Jeffrey, Carlyle's enthusiasm for the unfashionable Germans was inexplicable. What they did not understand was that German literature had renewed his faith in the "propensity" of feeling as the source of poetry. This is the theme of his essay on "The State of German Literature."

What impressed Carlyle was that German poetry was not a poetry of sensibility only, but a poetry of mind and heart. In the work of Goethe and Schiller he found both the "fire in the heart" and the depiction of reality as the

cold skeptic saw it. German poetry, unlike the romantic verses of Byron and Campbell, reconciled the conflicting propensities of intellect and feeling. It was the only "recent literature" that did so. What was more, this had been achieved at a moment when "gifted men" were complaining that poetry was dead (E, I, 66-67). Thomas Macaulay, for example, had argued that "as civilization advances poetry almost necessarily declines . . . In proportion as men know more and think more, they look less at individuals and more at classes. They therefore make better theories and worse poems."<sup>14</sup>

Carlyle, like Macaulay, feared that civilized man's cultivation of the intellect was made at the expense of the simple, emotional response to life. His retreat to a Scottish farm was his instinctive defense against the danger of overcultivating the mind. What German poetry meant to him was that the poet's eye could still discover the "secret significance" in a world that mind saw as barren and without meaning. Because the poet looked at nature with love, he revealed that

As all Nature's thousand changes  
But one changeless God proclaim,  
So in Art's wide kingdoms ranges  
One sole meaning, still the same:  
This is Truth, eternal Reason . . .

To Carlyle, the great age of English literature had been the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> He judged his contempo-

raries in terms of what Shakespeare (especially Shakespeare as author of The Tempest) and Milton had done, and found them wanting. The nineteenth century had not created a great dramatic literature, it had not written an epic poem that stood with the Illiad or the Aeneid. Was it still possible for great poetry to be written? To his Utilitarian contemporaries poetry was mere entertainment, "as good as pushpin."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps some of Carlyle's rage against the Utilitarians was inspired by his fear that they were right--that poetry could only be a trivial amusement in the age of science. The example of Goethe and Schiller proved that this was not so. There was beauty and wisdom in their poetry; they proved that art was not obsolete, and that the old values had not been banished by the triumph of persiflage.

Carlyle's essays on Goethe's poetry tell how his faith had been renewed in the creative imagination. In a number of ways they represent his defense of poetry.

In 1828, Goethe's publication of "Helena" (a fragment from the second part of Faust) gave Carlyle an opportunity to say something more about the significance of Goethe's poetry, in particular about Faust. He believed that Goethe's retelling of the mediaeval legend of Dr. Faustus had created a myth that described the condition of nineteenth-century man. His poem achieved something the old myths were unable to do; it objectified the "nameless pain" of modern man.

It showed how his restless search for happiness ended in "isolation, silence and despair" (E, I, 162).

Coleridge considered that the ancient Greek "mythi" were not just legends but philosophemes, statements of philosophical truth.<sup>18</sup> It was in this sense that Carlyle decided that Faust was a Christian "mythus" for nineteenth-century Europe. Marlowe's play belonged to a naive age, which had accepted the supernatural terrors of the literal hell which awaits Faust. Goethe's, however, brought a new and terrible insight into the story. Goethe had perceived that "were there but One Man in the world, he would be a terror to himself . . . it is as this One Man that Faust regards himself" (E, I, 160).

Goethe's Faust, as Carlyle saw him, was man alone in the universe, isolated from his fellows by his absorption in the pursuit of knowledge, a knowledge that is "precious only as power." Marlowe's Faust had not been conscious of his isolation, or if he was, he exulted in it. Modern man discovered, however, that knowledge alienated him from the traditional sources of human happiness. Some years before, Carlyle had written that under the cold eye of the scientific man, the natural world no longer had the power to suggest a lost Eden; it had become instead a hortus siccus, in which "the studious man wanders in solitude over rocky and tempestuous regions."<sup>19</sup> Carlyle had glimpsed the Blakean vision of hell--existence in a universe empty of meaning,

It was a hell created by the mind. It is this hell that Goethe's devil represents, the devil who is "the Denier" (E, I, 157).

The "Helena" essay opens with a lament that "the day of Magic is gone by," that the modern poet can no longer create the vision of "cloud-capped towers" that once enchanted and instructed the reader of poetry. Carlyle indeed suspected that poetic genius was dead. In Goethe's poetry, however, he found a world of myth and beautiful images that enchanted the imagination, and at the same time described the intellectual dilemma facing the nineteenth century. Goethe's very theme was the search for imaginative vision. Faust was a mythic treatment of this search. The "Helena" story was an allegory that suggested that the artist could "save himself . . . in the loftier regions of Art." Carlyle exulted in the "practical understanding" of the poet who had solved the great problem of the contemporary imagination. This was realistic poetry from a poet who "Anteus-like . . . derives his strength from the Earth." Thus he hailed Goethe as "the Foreigner of this era, who, of all others . . . deserves our study and appreciation" (E, I, 197).

Later in 1828 Carlyle published two articles that can be regarded as companion pieces. One was a long piece on Goethe, the other an essay on Burns. These two essays expressed his idea of poetry.

The defensive tone of the beginning of the essay on Goethe (his third on the poet) makes it clear that Carlyle felt he was writing for readers who were indifferent to a writer whose name was familiar to them only as the author of Werther. What he seeks to establish first is Goethe's importance in his own country; Carlyle claims that no writer since Luther has had such influence on the intellectual life of the German people (E, I, 203). He suggests that the development of Goethe's poetic genius parallels the growth of German culture in modern times. He presents a poet who is a man of enormous prestige in his own society.

Carlyle found that he could use Goethe to attack the genteel tradition. English critics tended to examine literature with an eye to discern whether it was written in the style of a gentleman (E, I, 204). He presents Goethe as a "universal Man": "He is neither noble nor plebian, neither liberal nor servile, nor infidel nor devotee" (E, I, 208). Some critics had commented on the vulgarity of certain scenes in Wilhelm Meister.<sup>20</sup> Sturdily convinced that Goethe was not vulgar, Carlyle replied that the taste that claimed to be offended by Goethe's realism was the taste of an over-refined minority that could not influence anyone of good sense. Goethe wrote for a wider public than the readers of the English upper class, for "persons of heart and head in Europe." Carlyle believed, with Goethe, that Europe was gradually becoming more and more "one public" (E, I, 207).

Carlyle also tried to encourage his readers to study Goethe by comparing him with "the fathers of English poetry," poets in whom great intellect was joined to faith. Goethe was a writer like John Bunyan and Milton--men whose works were read and loved by men of humble birth, by the kind of people that Carlyle himself came from. Goethe's poetry, he believed, could be enjoyed by many different kinds of men. The wisdom of Goethe was a unifying force where Voltaire's philosophy was the thinking of a mere "sect," and represented a minority of Frenchmen.

To Carlyle, Voltaire's works were the source of the persiflage that was popular in intellectual circles in London and Edinburgh. He blamed the lack of concern for society on the indifference to religion that he sensed lay underneath the worldly charm of the members of the Whig oligarchy. He hoped that if the dilettanti read Goethe instead of Voltaire they would discover a writer who would change their lives. They would become men with a sense of spiritual purpose. Thus he presented Goethe as a kind of cultural hero who had lived through the disillusionment that followed the French revolution and had become a stronger man. He described him as a poet who "cultivated himself and his art, he has studied how to live and how to write" (*italics mine*). The romantic self depicted in

Werther was transformed by time and experience into an artist and teacher: the man who wrote Wilhelm Meister believed that men could discover their spiritual strength if they joined with other men and did the work that seemed to be required of them. Carlyle saw Goethe as the Councillor of Weimar as well as an "Artist in the high and ancient meaning of that term" (E, I, 207). He was a poet who had a role in his society. It was this that made him an "exemplar" to Carlyle. Goethe was not an alien figure in his own world, as Carlyle feared he might be. He saw Wilhelm Meister as an allegorical "document" of an extraordinary life, one that could teach men how to attain serenity in a troubled time. The fact that Goethe had experienced and then overcome the romantic despair described in Werther was emblematic. Carlyle saw him as a kind of secular saint for the Protestant thinker.

In spite of this emphasis on Goethe as a kind of spiritual champion for the age, Carlyle continued to be interested in him as a poet. His enthusiasm led him to attempt to define what he meant by great poetry. He distinguished between two kinds of poet, one whose mastery of his art was seen in his "entire freedom from Mannerism," the other whose works revealed the individual who wrote. Goethe belonged in the first group, with poets like Shakespeare and Homer whose writings transcended their subjective personalities. Byron was characteristic of poets in the second group, because he "painted nothing else than himself,

be his subject what it might" (E, I, 215). In the plays of Shakespeare, the man Shakespeare appeared only as an elusive "voice." In the Homeric epics, Homer was simply "THE WITNESS" of what was described. Great art was impersonal because it rose above the subjective life of the particular poet. It presented experience directly. The distinction Carlyle makes between Goethe's universality and Byron's subjectivity is close to Schiller's differentiation between naive and sentimental poetry.<sup>21</sup> What Schiller called "naive" art, Carlyle defined as the product of "emblematic intellect" (E, I, 244). True poetic genius was a flowering of the whole man, not a product of a particular, perhaps over-intense sensibility.

Calmness and serenity are likely to be qualities with a strong appeal to turbulent natures. Carlyle's stress on Goethe's success in mastering his "tumultuous sensibility" lead one to think that he was a man of a passionate nature who was afraid of his own strong feelings. He turned away from Byron because he identified too easily with the romantic despair Byron expressed. Goethe's artistic detachment seemed wonderful to him: "While he moves every heart from its steadfastness, his own is firm and still . . . He is king of himself and of his world" (E, I, 246-47). Carlyle had been haunted by the fear that the romantic cult of the sensibility would inevitably corrupt the imagination; that the writer who dared to explore his own inner nature would lose control of his life, and become alienated from

his own people. In Faust and Wilhelm Meister Carlyle discovered the symbolic portrayal of a sensibility he felt was essentially nineteenth-century: "The coldest skeptic, the most callous worldling, sees not the actual aspects of life more sharply than they are here delineated: the Nineteenth Century stands before us, in all its contradiction and perplexity" (E, I, 66). But Goethe's "emblematic intellect" was powerful enough to make this reality beautiful, and meaningful. He was a true poet whose works showed that "the Imagination . . . still lives, and will forever live, in man's soul; and can again pour its wizard light over the Universe" (E, I, 215).

The essay on Burns has a spontaneity and ease one does not find in the essay on Goethe. Burns's poetry was part of Carlyle's childhood; it was dear to his heart before he knew the need to defend poetry, or to form the image of a poet that would impress the skeptical minds of a Utilitarian society. The article on Burns, however, posed a problem. Burns was a poet whose life was a known disaster. In his case, it was difficult to speak of the artist as a man more complete than other men. Nevertheless, Carlyle believed in Burns's genius. If failure there was, he believed it was because the society Burns was born into had failed to find an appropriate place for him.

The Burns essay is written with a fine conviction. Carlyle's exuberant pleasure in quoting from particular poems, and reminding his readers of others, shows how deep-

felt his enjoyment of Burns's poetry was. When he sought to explain his conviction of the quality of these poems, he fell back on two terms, neither of which he had used in discussing Goethe's poetry, "truth" and "nature." Burns's poetry was great because of "his Sincerity, his indisputable air of Truth" (E, I, 267).

It is important to determine what Carlyle meant by Burns's being "sincere," for it was to be a significant term in his lectures on Heroes. At first it would seem to refer to the poet's truth to his own experience, to the fact that Burns did not describe a "fabulous" world, but scenes of the life around him. But the word also describes the quality of spontaneous feeling, of words spoken directly from the heart. Words so spoken evoke a direct response because, according to Carlyle, men are "knit together by the tie of sympathy." But when he compares Burns's poetry to Byron's, it becomes clear that by "sincerity" he meant something more than spontaneity of expression. Byron's poetry was sincere, he argued, only in the latter part of Don Juan, because there he became "so intent on his subject as, for moments, to forget himself" (E, I, 268-69). Once again, Carlyle used Byron's poetry as a touchstone to distinguish between great poetry, in which personality was transcended, and Romantic poetry; he contrasts sincere Burns with "theatrical" Byron. Burns's "sincerity" is not quite as simple as it first seemed. What Carlyle meant was not just truth to inner feeling, but truth to a larger

reality--a rendering of the wholeness of experience, undistorted by subjectivity, or (as Carlyle called it) "affectation." He saw something Shakespearean in Burns's realism. The poetic genius's power to transcend his own experience enabled him to portray the universal experience of men.

While he praised the universal quality of Burns's poetry, Carlyle also responded to its native, Scottish tone, to a poetry that grew out of the soil of his own country. "Redolent of natural life and hardy, natural men," it had more vigor and warmth than the literature of "attenuated cosmopolitanism" (E, I, 287). There is more than a suggestion of romantic Rousseauism in these enthusiastic words. To Carlyle, Burns's grace and strength were the consequences of the poet's sympathy and closeness to the life of men who lived with nature. His work revealed a sense of "mysterious brotherhood" which was not found in Scottish literary men of earlier generations. Burns's imagination spoke to the imagination of his own people, because it was deeply rooted in the reality of their lives.

The essays on Goethe and Burns were much more than the review articles they professed to be. They were a young writer's manifesto, a statement of his belief that poetic genius existed, and might still be a vital fact in the nineteenth century, despite the hostile influences of Utilitarian thinking. Poetry of deep feeling was being written in spite of the persiflage of contemporary intel-

lectuals. It appeared in unexpected places, in an insignificant German duchy, and on a humble Scottish farm. Goethe's genius was recognized by all classes in Germany. Burns, the Peasant-poet, was lionized by the gentry of Scotland.

It was a vital part of Carlyle's argument to place Goethe and Burns firmly in the context of nineteenth-century life, and to show how they were related to the movement of thought and feeling in their time. There was one important aspect of the times, however, that these essays of his more or less ignored. The author of "Signs of the Times" did not attempt to suggest what the role of poetic genius was, or might be, in an age of violent revolution. He had nothing to say of Burns's Jacobinism, or of Goethe's significant lack of enthusiasm for the democratic revolution in France. He failed to examine what place literature might have in the struggle that he knew to be taking place in the whole fabric of society, what he so clearly saw as the "grinding collision of the New with the Old."<sup>22</sup> Instead, he romanticized. He spoke of the "pathos" of Burns's death, and argued that it had more tragic significance than Napoleon's, because mankind had more need of the poet's "heart" than the conqueror's "hard intellect" (E, I, 264).

The romantic essay on Burns contradicts the theme of the unity of mind and feeling which is central to the Goethe essay. This contradiction reveals a divided Carlyle. So does his treatment of Burns's life. On the one hand,

he pointed out how Burns's personal tragedy came from a "want of unity in his purposes," a lack of direction in his life; on the other, he wrote in lyric tones of the "grand, unrhymed Romance" of the poet's life (E, I, 311; 291). Burns's weakness reminded him of Swift's final insanity, and of Rousseau's retreat from society.

The Goethe essay is built on the essential harmony between the poet's life and his poetry. The Burns essay implies something quite different, that the poet, the suffering man of feeling, is doomed to live in wretched alienation from the society he is born into. To Carlyle, Burns's misery was inevitable in a society that bestowed its favors on inventors and engineers, and was indifferent to men of "heart." The Goethe essay assumes that the poet can achieve a wisdom which enables him to transcend the anarchy of feeling which disrupts the lives of other men. The Burns essay assumes that the poet born in the nineteenth century, into a society actively opposed to the simple spontaneous emotions of men of heart, is born to a life of suffering. One finds that Carlyle had two quite contradictory concepts of poetic genius, and thus two quite different ideas of the role of the man of letters in modern civilization. Which was going to be the decisive one in his life, and in his theory?

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup>The Love Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh, ed. Alexander Carlyle, 2 vols. (London: John Lane, 1909), I, 214.

<sup>2</sup>Love Letters II, 63-68.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Mme. de Stael, De l'Allemagne, ed. la Comtesse Jean de Pange, 4 vols. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1959), IV, 80-81.

<sup>5</sup>James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835, 2 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1882), I, 109.

<sup>6</sup>Love Letters I, 21.

<sup>7</sup>De l'Allemagne IV, 80-81.

<sup>8</sup>Collectanea Thomas Carlyle 1821-1855, ed. S. A. Jones (Canton, Pann.: Kirgate Press, 1903), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>11</sup>Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle, ed. C. E. Norton (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 34. Hereafter references will be to Corr. Goethe & Carlyle.

<sup>12</sup>Collectanea, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>T. B. Macaulay, Critical and Historical Essays (London: Dent's Everyman's Library, 1907), I, 153.

<sup>15</sup>Carlyle is quoting here from the third stanza of a choral song sung to Wilhelm in Die Wanderjahre, chapter 13.

<sup>16</sup>Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle, ed. C. E. Norton (1898; rpt. Mamaroneck, N. Y., 1972), pp. 69-70. Later references are to Note Books.

<sup>17</sup>J. S. Mill, "Bentham," Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society (Collected Works, Toronto, 1969), X, 113.

<sup>18</sup>S. T. Coleridge, Literary Remains, 2 vols., ed. H. N. Coleridge (London: W. Pickering, 1836), II, 334-35.

<sup>19</sup>Love Letters, II, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas De Quincey, Collected Writings, ed. David Masson (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1889-90), XI, pp. 222-226.

<sup>21</sup>Friedrich Schiller: Naive and Sentimental Poetry, trans. J. A. Elias (New York: F. Ungar, 1966), pp. 176 ff. Schiller distinguishes between two human types: the naive who draws on the outer world, and the sentimental who nourishes himself from within. The danger of the sentimental type is he tends to exaggerate, to overextend himself, on the one hand, and to be platitudinous and indolent, on the other.

<sup>22</sup>"Signs of the Times," (E, II, 82).

## CHAPTER II

## A Son of Time

In 1824, Carlyle began a correspondence with the man he believed to be the foremost artist of his time. He introduced himself to Goethe by sending him a presentation copy of the newly translated Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and received a gracious note in reply. Three years later, he sent off as "a disciple to his Master" his Life of Schiller (1825) and the four volumes of German Romance (1826). This time the response was truly heartwarming: Goethe wrote that he was impressed by the understanding and insight into Schiller's character that his Scottish correspondent had shown; such understanding, he noted, proved the truth of the old proverb, "Der gut Wille hilft zu vollkommener Kenntniss"<sup>1</sup> [Good will helps bring full understanding].

Goethe was one of the first to respond to the warmth of feeling, that passionate commitment to his subject that draws readers to Carlyle. Even more important to him, however, were Goethe's words in praise of his work as a translator:

Und so ist jeder Uebersetzer anzusehen, dass er sich als Vermittler dieses allgemein geistigen Handels bemüht, und den Wechseltausch zu befördern sich zum Geschäft macht. . . .  
Der Koran sagt: 'Gott hat jedem Volke einen

Propheten gegeben in seiner eignen Sprache.'  
 So ist jeder Uebersetzer ein Prophet seinem  
 Volke. Luther's Bibelübersetzung hat die  
 grossten Wirkungen hervorgebracht . . .<sup>2</sup>

{And so every translator is to be looked on  
 as an interpreter of the work of the uni-  
 versal intellect, who is concerned to promote  
 this exchange. . . . The Koran says, "God  
 has given every people a prophet in their  
 own language." So every translator is a  
 prophet to his people. Luther's translation  
 of the Bible has produced the greatest  
 results. . . .

To Carlyle, this was the praise, the recognition that a son  
 (so often in vain) looks for from a father. The value of  
 his work had been acknowledged. Under the spell of these  
 words, he wrote back to Goethe, "I look forward with cheer-  
 fulness to a life spent in Literature."<sup>3</sup> He felt a new  
 sense of commitment to his life as a man of letters. He had  
 been hailed as a prophet!

This correspondence, so happily begun, continued until  
 shortly before Goethe's death. Writing to Goethe, Carlyle  
 never showed his humorous, satirical side, never was familiar  
 or irritable as he was in the letters he wrote at this time  
 to Jeffrey, or to Leigh Hunt. Indeed, the two correspondents  
 maintained the tone they had established from the first,  
 Goethe writing in the magisterial but affectionate manner  
 familiar to us in the Conversations with Eckermann, Carlyle  
 responding as his devoted disciple who is first of all an  
 ardent student of German literature. True, he admitted in  
 a letter of 1829 that he was dissatisfied to find himself  
 "still but an Essayist" and mentioned that he was contempla-

ting a book on Luther, but Goethe did not respond to these remarks. A year later, Carlyle confessed to him that he was experiencing a "wonderful Chaos within me, full of natural Supernaturalism . . . I see not well what is to come of it all, and only conjecture from the violence of the fermentation that something strange may come."<sup>4</sup> This was as far as he would go in admitting to Goethe that he was at work on a "strange piece" (Sartor Resartus), an event that he reported with great excitement in the privacy of his journal.<sup>5</sup> Earlier that year (January, 1831) he casually let drop that he was busy with "a curious enterprise of my own," but this elliptical remark was all that he told Goethe about a work which was to be full of allusions, direct and indirect, to the work and the life of "the wisest of this age" (SR, 67). The only hint Carlyle's letters contain of the importance of Goethe in his thinking at this time is in the last letter he wrote to the old poet. In his solitary life at Craigenputtock, "Weimar is not distant but near and friendly, a familiar city of the Mind. Daily must I send affectionate wishes thither; daily must I think . . . of the Man to whom, more than to any other living, I stand indebted and united. . . . To him I owe the all-precious knowledge and experience that Reverence is still possible, nay, Reverence for our fellowman, as a true emblem of the Highest."<sup>6</sup> It is a letter which explains almost nothing in Book I of Sartor, but a good deal about Book II.

What kind of book was Carlyle writing, and why was he so reluctant to tell his "spiritual Father" about the work in progress?

The germ of Sartor seems to have been a grotesque vision expressing a satirical view of society that Carlyle first recorded in August 1830.<sup>7</sup>

What is a man if you look at him with the mere Logical sense, with the Understanding?  
A pitiful hungry biped that wears breeches.  
Often when I read of pompous ceremonials,  
drawing-room levees and coronations, on a sudden the clothes fly off the whole party in my fancy, and they stand there straddling, in a half-ludicrous, half-horrid condition!

This vision was developed into an essay "On Clothes" that Carlyle submitted to Fraser's Magazine in 1830. But two months later he retrieved it from Fraser's, and began to work it into a piece of fiction with two characters, an ironic British editor and a German philosopher named Teufelsdröckh. When he submitted it to Fraser's, he described it as a "kind of Didactic Novel," adding, "I used to characterize it briefly as a kind of 'Satirical Extravaganza on Things in General.'"<sup>8</sup> The words "used to" may refer to the intention of the first version (the essay on clothes) rather than to the final developed fiction.

It seems likely that Carlyle was secretive about his "satirical extravaganza" when he wrote to Goethe, because he was still uncertain about the kind of writer he wanted to be. Goethe had touched on a secret string of his ambition, his desire to be the Luther of his time, and a prophet

to his countrymen. When he wrote to Goethe he was writing to the man who had taught him that it was still possible to be a "believer" in the nineteenth century (E, I, 66). How then could he reveal that he was at work on a satirical fantasy, a mocking view of man that was the product of "the mere Logical sense," of the Understanding only?<sup>9</sup> Such a work must have seemed to him quite opposed in spirit to Goethe's serene wisdom. One side of him aspired to be, like Goethe, a "teacher and a reverencer," (E, I, 249) but another delighted in ridicule and in satire. The Edinburgh wit was at war with the would-be poet.

The kind of novel that Carlyle finally wrote was a strange blend of satire, autobiography and social prophecy. It was both subjective and objective. The breakthrough came with his invention of the mythic Teufelsdröck as the spokesman for the satire, and of the "speculative" Editor as the interpreter of the enigmatic "little sage" (SR, 26). Only by means of the eccentric professor did he dare to present his satirical attack on established religion and the governing classes, or his expectations of fast-approaching revolutionary changes in English society. As soon as his absurd (intentionally absurd) professor became too "wild," he quickly introduced a word from the Editor with a note of caution.

Carlyle's strategy in Sartor is dramatic: he brings together in ironic conflict two contrasting points of view. One expresses his skeptical, tentative Edinburgh self, the

disciple of Hume and Gibbon, the other the man of feeling, the self that responded ardently to the poetic imagination of Faust and to the allegories of Wilhelm Meister.

Essentially there are two voices in Sartor. Book I is primarily the monologue of the analytical reviewer, the voice of the Understanding. It is the book of the Edinburgh intellectual who is somewhat suspicious of the new literature from Germany. In Book II, the voice of the poet and myth-maker is heard in a section which is surely the work of the "wizard light" of the imagination. The autobiography of Teufelsdröckh mingles the two voices of poet and critic in a counterpoint that expresses Carlyle's state of mind in the early 1830's.

The structure of the book demonstrates Carlyle's determination not to be a subjective writer. Carlyle devised in Sartor an elaborate fiction to conceal the personal nature of his material: the history of his own opinions, the story of his life. While he confessed to Emerson that Rousseau's Confessions was the first book that made him think deeply, Carlyle distrusted autobiography.<sup>10</sup> Rousseau's sensational presentation of his life was unpleasantly "theatrical" to Carlyle. It disturbed him.

The reader of Carlyle's letters and journals can imagine what a temptation it was for him to tell his story in the style of a "dandy of sorrows." But just as Carlyle despised the dandy's affectation in wearing clothes that called attention to his appearance, he despised a literary style that called attention to the writer. In Sartor he was determined to avoid speaking directly of his own feelings. He wished to transcend them, as he perceived Goethe had done, in a work of art. When he recalled his first version of the book from "editorial durance in London," it was because he sensed that "the thing is not right, not Art; yet perhaps a nearer approach to Art than I have yet made. We ought to try."<sup>11</sup>

Carlyle aspired to be in the rank of writers like Shakespeare and Goethe whose works seemed to reveal the wholeness of life undistorted by the particular opinions or emotions of the man Shakespeare, or of Councillor Goethe. As James Joyce was later to dream of being the artist who, like God, contemplates his creation while studying his finger nails, Carlyle wanted to write a book that revealed of himself at the most a "sardonic smile."<sup>12</sup> Sartor was devised to conceal the defiant, ascerbic Scottish intellectual

"loner" who wrote from his "Patmos" in the Border country. Instead of narrating the history of his life and opinions in the first person, he created two contrasting personae to present his material, an urbane British editor without a name, and a satirical German professor called Teufelsdröckh who was not only a man of letters but a romantic wanderer and a prophet of revolution. Assuming these masks, Carlyle expresses his scorn of the empty posturing of leaders of church and state and his faith in the poetic imagination. The intensely personal content of this, his first book, was cunningly concealed in the fragments quoted from a supposedly learned work of Philosophy and in excerpts from a poetic autobiography that were written in a language and style bound to "astonish most that read it," as the proud author boasted in his letter to the publishers.<sup>12</sup>

Carlyle placed on the title page of Sartor three epigraphs from contemporary German literature, the first from Goethe, the others from Novalis and Fichte. The theme of the two lines from Goethe (which are from the title page of Wilhelm Meister) is the joyful acceptance of a legacy (mein Vermächtniss).

Mein Vermächtniss, wie herrlich weit und breit  
Die Zeit ist mein Vermächtniss, mein Acker die Zeit.

[My inheritance, how gloriously far and wide  
Time is my inheritance, my land is time.]

In this way Carlyle acknowledges his debt to Goethe. But the question is, how did Goethe's work influence Carlyle's

novel? The epigraph from Novalis (The world is a universal trope of the spirit, a symbolic picture of it) suggests that he, not Goethe, is the source of the transcendental view of nature found in Sartor. And the epigraph from Fichte (Not mere knowledge, but according to your knowledge / Doing is your commitment) draws attention to that philosopher as the inspiration of the philosophy of action in the book.

Although it contains many references to Wilhelm Meister, Sartor is not an English Bildungsroman starring an English William or a Scottish Thomas. It is not a lyrical fiction like Werther, or a psychological novel of the Richardsonian kind like Elective Affinities. As a piece of prose fiction, Sartor is quite unlike in form or style any of Goethe's novels. The influence of Goethe's theory of renunciation on Sartor has been much discussed<sup>13</sup> but Wilhelm Meister influenced Carlyle in ways that have not been examined. This novel was interesting to Carlyle for two reasons, his knowledge of the hidden connection between the hero's adventures and the author's life, and his perception of the author's detachment from his material. Carlyle knew from his reading of Dichtung und Wahrheit that some of Wilhelm's love affairs and his adventures in the theater paralleled events in Goethe's life. But he also sensed the presence of Goethe behind the mask of the other characters, behind Jarno, and Lothario, and the Abbé. He heard the voice of Goethe the teacher in the sages who mysteriously watch over Wilhelm's wanderings. He perceived

that Goethe was playing more than one role in his fiction, and giving expression to more than one aspect of the self.

In Carlyle's fiction, the early life of the eccentric German professor Teufelsdröckh resembles incidents in his own life. And his two main characters form a double image which dramatizes the two contrasting roles which Carlyle wished to play, the critical-satiric, and the poetic-prophetic. In the form he chose, however, this encounter of different aspects of the self is peculiarly undramatic in that it avoids a direct confrontation. Carlyle admired Diderot's Le Neveu du Rameau (which Goethe had translated between 1796 and 1803), but he did not attempt to present his "moi" and "lui" by means of dialogue. His two selves are effectively distanced from one another as editor from unseen author so that their encounter is without the element of the theatrical he so distrusted. He avoided dramatic conflict, aiming instead for a kind of mystery, hoping that his anonymous editor and mythic hero would provide that imaginative element of wonder that he felt was missing in "our present advanced state of culture." He wanted his book to startle and surprise the sophisticated mind of the scientific age to which "the Creation of a World is little more mysterious than the cooking of a dumpling" (SR 34). His hope was that if he succeeded in doing this, he would prove that the poetic imagination was not obsolete in nineteenth-century England.

Carlyle was not altogether truthful when he denigrated

the element of romance in Wilhelm Meister (WM, 6). It was not Goethe's realistic account of the life of the theater that interested him, but his poetic world of symbolic encounters, and the half-mythical characters like the old Harper and the Amazon, and above all the beautiful Mignon whose history "runs like a thread of gold through the tissue of the narrative" (WM, 10). Carlyle was intrigued by hidden meanings. One reason why he adumbrates a philosophy of clothes is that he perceives that garments both conceal and reveal truth. The fact that he chose to translate Goethe's Das Märchen and the Novella rather than Faust (as he kept promising to) suggests his fascination with a kind of fiction that deals not with external reality but with the mind's search for spiritual truths. Wilhelm Meister was an allegory in which "man and his concerns are represented in the first of European minds." In his preface to Die Wanderungen, he did not hesitate to compare Goethe's novel to The Faerie Queene. (E, I, 233).

Carlyle admired Goethe's control of his material. To him, he seemed in Wilhelm Meister to wear "a face of the most still indifference throughout the affair; often it is even wrinkled by a slight sardonic grin" (WM, 6). This "grin" implied Goethe's distance from passion. The many masks worn by Goethe in the narrative of Wilhelm's adventures enabled him to speak in different voices. (It is interesting that Goethe confesses in Dichtung und Wahrheit to the pleasure he took in appearing before his friends in disguise.)<sup>14</sup>

Carlyle perceived that Goethe's personae freed him from the necessity of expressing only one point of view. Writing Sartor was a liberating experience for Carlyle, for he found that he could use personae to give him the much desired distance from his passions--from his anger at the "quackery" he perceived around him, and from the passion of despair that threatened to engulf him when he considered his own ineffectualness, his failure to make a mark on his times.

From his close study of Wilhelm Meister, Carlyle realized the possibilities fiction offered a writer like himself who wanted to express the truths he had learned from his own experiences, but shrank from the subjective mode of Rousseau. Byron and Rousseau, the writers he and Jane had admired and studied in 1821-22, depicted the pain and alienation of the self in a mode inexpressibly disturbing to Carlyle. In Goethe he found a writer who wrote of himself whether in fiction or autobiography with a calm serenity that proved to Carlyle that he was truly "king of himself." (E, I, 247) Carlyle was unable to write about the central experience of his life until he found the means to distance himself from his turbulent emotions.

Carlyle has a number of references in Sartor to the chapter in Dichtung und Wahrheit in which Goethe describes his state of mind shortly before he wrote Werther. For some time he had been tormented by the thought of committing suicide, had tried to write of it, but was unable to:

"nothing would come to a definite form: I lacked an event,

a fable in which they could be overlooked."<sup>15</sup> The news of his friend Jerusalem's suicide was the event, the catalyst he needed, and he began to write almost "like a somnambulist," and "freed myself from that stormy element upon which through my own fault and that of others . . . I had been driven about in the most violent manner."<sup>16</sup> It was not an act of will but an external event that "solved his poetic problem." After writing Werther, Goethe felt as if he had made a general confession and was "once more happy and free, and justified in beginning a new life." The writing of Sartor had a similar effect on Carlyle. He was liberated from his emotional turmoil by two events, one from the outside, one from within. The first was Goethe's recognition of his talent. The second was the vision he had one day at Templand of the leading men and women of his society suddenly exposed to the world without their clothes.<sup>17</sup>

The writing of Sartor solved the "poetic problem" that was fermenting in Carlyle's mind in the late 1820's. Goethe had solved his by writing a novel about a frustrated young man in an embassy. Carlyle's solution was to write the biography of a German professor, a half-comic, half-romantic "sage" of humble birth. In Werther, an unnamed friend narrates the story and provides the impersonal frame that contains the hero's sufferings. In Sartor, the fictional device of an English editor is the frame which contains Teufelsdröckh's satire, his poetic enthusiasm, and his radical hopes. At the beginning, the two voices

alternate with the editor's predominating until the turning point of Book II. Up till then, the intellectual, reflective editor is "the main Actor," just as Carlyle proposed in his letter to Fraser's.

The theme of Book I is the impact of a new philosophy on an English editor who describes himself as "a man of confirmed speculative habits" (SR, 8). The new philosophy arrives on his desk in the form of a book by a German professor with an outlandish name who hails from an absurd-sounding place. The opening of Sartor is reminiscent of Thomas More's serio-comic introduction of his utopian fiction through the mouthpiece of Ralph Hythloday. Carlyle, like More, contrives to introduce new ideas through a character who might belong in a comedy of humor: his very name warns the reader that he is full of "dreck." The Editor, on the other hand, assumes the serious role of a man of letters who laments the impact of scientific studies on man's life and environment, which have been "probed, dissected, distilled, dessicated and scientifically decomposed" (SR, 5). With this flourish of verbal hyperbole, Carlyle conveys his contempt for the popular achievements of science in his time. His sarcastic praise of science is part of the complex irony that undercuts every aspect of contemporary life that the Editor mentions: English Rotten Boroughs, Revolts in Paris, or the idealistic German thinker in his watch tower (SR, 6). The Editor is introduced as a man not easily impressed by either the facts or the theories of nineteenth-century progress.

From the beginning, one of the main themes of the Editor's narrative is his difficulty in assessing the new philosophy. Its novelty, the range of its ideas, his ignorance of the source of these ideas, the kind of culture from which they spring--all these factors were a part of Carlyle's experience during the 1820's when he was reading Kant, Fichte, Novalis and Richter, Schiller and Goethe. One of the oldest traditions in satire is the satirist's technique of self-mockery. By this device, he hopes to allay the reader's suspicions of his intentions (the criticism of accepted wisdom) and to gain some sympathy. The Editor is "the main Actor" in the sense that he is the source of Carlyle's elaborate machinery to distance the reader, at first, from the satirical Teufelsdröckh. Thus the Editor finds the new philosophy so strange that he can only quote those fragments he understands. His difficulties and his hesitations contrive an atmosphere of mystery which obscures the message of Teufelsdröckh's book, yet lead the reader on with hopes of making a valuable discovery. The Editor describes the new work as "a very Sea of Thought . . . wherein the toughest pearl-diver may dive to his utmost depth and return not only with sea-wreck but with true orient" (SR, 10). He hails Teufelsdröckh with these words, "Brave Teufelsdröckh, who could tell what lurked in thee? Under those thick locks of thine . . . there dwelt a most busy brain" (SR, 16). Thus the Editor stresses the enigmatic nature of the German philosopher, yet contrives to suggest

that he is the source of hidden wisdom. The artful Carlyle uses the Editor's voice to question and criticize. He apologizes for Teufelsdröckh's faults, his lack of knowledge of upper class life, his possible Sansculottism (SR, 59-60). He mockingly calls him an "our wild seer" (144), or "foolish Teufelsdröckh;" "a speculative Radical" (63), and finally, but more often "our professor." The epithets show how the Editor's attitude changes.

By presenting only fragments from Teufelsdröckh's work (a literary device Carlyle knew from Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel) and by alternating the voices of Teufelsdröckh as critic of society and the Editor as critic of Teufelsdröckh, he achieved the effect of that "sardonic grin," that Goethean detachment he desired. The satire is undercut by the ironic, skeptical voice of the Editor. We hear his voice now sarcastic, now apologetic, now waxing enthusiastic, but always endeavoring to control the possibly alarming, even shocking pronouncements of the man he at first patronisingly describes as "the little Sage" (SR, 26).

The Editor's tone of mockery and apology fades as Book I progresses, however. A note of elation is heard when he announces that a work of art is emerging from "a German printed and written Chaos" (SR, 80). The Editor's humble task of transcribing, quoting, collating, interpreting, gradually is seen to be a creative activity: a bridge is being built over the confused sea of thought, and the Editor is no longer a man almost drowning in its turbulent waves.

By the end of Book I he announces he will offer an epic story which will link together in an over-arching span the disparate elements of Teufelsdröckh's thought. In this way he introduces the biography of Teufelsdröckh, an emblematic account of the growth of the artist-writer, which describes his journey from rural anonymity to his anticipated arrival in what Carlyle would later call the modern Babylon.

The theme of the last chapter of Book I is unity. The German professor is a mystic who has led the Editor to "even-higher" heights of wisdom: "more piercing, all-comprehending, all-confounding are his views and glances" (SR, 71). Teufelsdröckh affirms that there are "Forces" behind every object man sees. All experience is united in "the great vital system of Immensity." Life continues through "perpetual metamorphoses" so that nothing is ever lost. According to Teufelsdröckh, finite objects are the "windows through which the philosophic eye looks into Infinite itself" (SR, 72).

Teufelsdröckh's words in this chapter are full of echoes from Goethe. His belief in a life force that transcends death is the theme of Goethe's poem significantly named "Vermächtnis" [the legacy]:

Kein Wesen kann zu Nichts zerfallen!  
 Das Ewige regt sich fort in allen,  
 Am Sein erhalte dich beglückt!  
 Das Sein ist ewig: denn Gesetze  
 Bewahren die lebendigen Schätze,  
 Aus welchen sich das All schmückt.

[Nothing that is can dissolve into nothingness.  
 In all that lives the Eternal Force works on:  
 remain, rejoicing, in Being. Being is eternal;

for laws preserve the living treasures with which the universe has adorned itself.]<sup>18</sup>

When the Editor in wonderment asks "What vacant high-sailing air-ships are these, and whither will they sail with us?" he is using an image for poetic truth that Goethe used in Dichtung und Wahrheit. Attempting to distinguish between true poetry and poetry that is valuable only because it is morally useful, he wrote,

True poetry announces itself thus, that, as a worldly gospel, it can by internal cheerfulness and external comfort free us from the earthly burdens which press upon us. Like an air-balloon, it lifts us . . . into higher regions, and lets the confused labyrinths of the earth lie developed before us as in a bird's eye view.<sup>19</sup>

In Sartor, Goethe's simile has become a metaphor, an expansive image the Editor uses to describe the poetic philosophy of Teufelsdröckh. He sees Teufelsdröckh's vision of reality "unfolding itself into new boundless expansions, of a cloudcapt, almost chimerical aspect." The Editor has been transformed from a skeptic to a believer.

Book I enacts Carlyle's conversion from his doubts about the value of poetry to his new faith that language itself is creative. Words are the garments woven by the imagination which reveal "the else invisible creations and inspirations of our reason"; written words are emblematic forms created by

imagination aided by "the Hand" (SR, 73). A second metamorphosis has also taken place. Teufelsdröckh has changed from being merely an eccentric philosopher to a "mystic."

The final paragraph of this book depicts Carlyle himself at work. He relates how his task of interpreting the new German literature to an indifferent British public demands his utmost energy and understanding. Exultant at one moment, sinking into self-pity the next ("some fraction of his allotted natural sleep nightly leaving him"), Carlyle from behind the mask of Editor reveals his certainty that the new ideas he brings forward promise "new-coming Eras, the first dim rudiments and already budding germs of a nobler Era in Universal History." On this note of high optimism, he moves next to narrate the biography of Teufelsdröckh, the emblematic story of his own life.

ii

"Who am I; what is the ME? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance; some embodied, visualised Idea in the Eternal mind? . . . We sit as in a boundless Phantasmagoria and Dream-grotto; boundless, for the faintest star . . . lies not even nearer the verge thereof: sounds and many-coloured visions flit round our sense."  
(SR, 53)

Book II presents a symbolic world in which Teufelsdröckh is the passive hero of a romantic fiction.<sup>20</sup> This is Carlyle's "phantasmagoria," reality experienced as images in a dream. This book is the test of Carlyle's detachment from troubling subjectivity, for it narrates the history of

of his life, and in particular that "immense victory," his conversion. To achieve an aesthetic distance from his subject in the first book he used the ironic voice of the Editor. In the following book, he developed another, he consciously imitated the atmosphere of German romance, the humorous idyllic dream-world of the kind he knew from his translations of Jean Paul Richter's stories. The first three chapters are narrated in this style, presenting pastoral village scenes with characters bearing comic-grotesque names such as Andreas Futteral, Herr Towgood, and Blumine.

A particularly interesting device in Book II is the use of poetic epithet to describe the changing roles the hero plays. Teufelsdröckh is a young Diogenes<sup>21</sup> who begins life as Gneschen, an innocent creature "who knows not what we mean by Time" (SR, 90). Later he becomes a Son of Time, the Wanderer, a "sky-messenger" and most significantly, Werther. In this book Carlyle develops the prophetic voice, a mode that draws on the story of Christ (as it is told in the New Testament), and on the spiritual education of the hero of Wilhelm Meister. The allusions to Goethe's novels indicate the large part they played in Carlyle's imagination at this time.

In the first three chapters which describe Teufelsdröckh's childhood, he lives in an idyllic world. His parents and his village are described in a gentle mock-heroic style intended to suggest the rose-colored light in which poets

view their childhood. Carlyle's mockery of this Wordsworthian vision of childhood is affectionate; the idyll is disturbed only when he speaks of the "Passivity" the child Teufelsdröckh endured. "My Active Power (Thatkraft) was unfavourably hemmed-in . . . rather to bear and forbear than to make and do. I was forbid much: wishes in any measure bold I had to renounce" (SR, 98). He introduces an important Goethean theme, the need for "good Activity," and foreshadows the crisis in his hero's life.

Carlyle makes this significant criticism of his childhood only to withdraw it. "Let me not quarrel with my upbringing," says Teufelsdröckh, "It was rigorous, too frugal, compressively secluded . . . how unskilful soever, it was loving, it was well-meant" (SR, 99). Love was symbolized by the mother who taught the child by acts and "daily reverent look" what goodness was. The child learned the meaning of reverence from seeing his mother on her knees, "The highest whom I knew on Earth I here saw bowed down . . . before a Higher in Heaven." He understood reverence as a kind of loving stillness, a feeling without words.

After chapter four, the tender epithets appropriate to the world of childhood yield to a new one: Teufelsdröckh is a Son of Time. The idyll of childhood is past: "Necessity urges him on; Time will not stop, neither can he, a Son of Time; wild passions without solacement, wild faculties without employment ever vex and agitate him."

As a Son of Time he has to work but has no "inward guidance" to tell him what his work should be (SR, 121).

Teufelsdröckh embarks on a "stern Monodrama" whose theme is "No Object and no Rest." These words refer to the passage in Goethe's play in which Faust condemns himself as an "Unmensch," [a monster] who is an outcast from society because his life is without purpose:

Bin ich der Flüchtling nicht? der Unbehauste?  
 Der Unmensch ohne Zweck und Ruh',  
 Der wie ein Wassersturz von Fels zu Felsen brauste  
 Begierig wütend nach dem Abgrund zu?<sup>22</sup>

[What am I but an outcast, without home,  
 Or human tie, or aim, or resting place,  
 That like a torrent raved along in foam  
 From rock to rock, with ravening fury wild  
 On to the brink of the abyss?]

This quotation from Faust is characteristic of the way Carlyle exploits Goethe's text for his own purposes. Faust sees himself as an outcast because he has betrayed Gretchen's love for him. But Teufelsdröckh has done nothing wrong. He is not a Faustian hero but an emblematic figure of the young Carlyle who felt himself to be "ohne Zweck und Ruh'." Faust's image of life as a turbulent river raging over rocks, and then abruptly falling into an abyss, lingered long in Carlyle's imagination. This fearful anticipation of a sudden fall into nothingness was not only characteristic of his anxiety at the time he lost his religious belief. He would eventually project it onto his whole society, as we can see in the apocalyptic imagery of "Shooting Niagara."

The Son of Time is revealed to be a poet, a "winged sky-messenger" who can barely survive on the bread-and-water wages he earns as a humble translator (SR, 123). He experiences the age he lives in as a Chronos, an oppressive father who is bent on devouring his young (SR, 127). He becomes an "ironic man, with his sly stillness, and ambuscading ways" who feels that he is an enemy of society, a "torpedo" (SR, 129). This cluster of images shows that the young Carlyle in his own eyes was a rebel against the world.

As the Son of Time motif continues, Teufelsdröckh is described in many roles: he is an oppressed Jew toiling in Egypt, the solitary rover Ulysses, a Wanderer, "the thunder-struck Air-sailor." In the Byronic phase of his life, he is forever dramatizing himself. He moves in imagination from one role to another, comparing his troubled state of mind to the sufferings experienced by the heroes of story and legend. The comparison is ironic, especially when the Editor reports his troubles under the mocking rubric "The Sorrows of Teufelsdröckh." When the poet vainly tried to find comfort reading Epictetus, the Editor cries out angrily, "Thou foolish Teufelsdröckh. How could it else? Hadst thou not Greek enough to understand thus much: The End of Man is an Action, and not a Thought" (SR, 155). His words foreshadow the moment when Teufelsdröckh understands that he must leave his Byronic self behind him and begin an active life.

Although Teufelsdröckh's sufferings are mocked, they are not made contemptible. For they are a part of a necessary dialectic process towards a new understanding of himself, a process that Carlyle compares to the catharsis Goethe experienced when he wrote out his romantic despair in Werther. Teufelsdröckh has embarked on a mental journey which is preparatory to a new consciousness of himself.

"Thus must he, over the whole surface of the Earth . . . write his Sorrows of Teufelsdröckh; even as the great Goethe in passionate words had to write his Sorrows of Werther (sic) before the spirit freed herself and he could become a Man" (SR, 156). Once he had written Werther, Goethe reported in Dichtung und Wahrheit, he felt "once more happy and free, and justified in beginning a new life."

This comparison of Teufelsdröckh's mental sufferings with the Sturm und Drang period of Goethe's life elevates the meaning of what has hitherto been subject to the Editor's irony. After this, Teufelsdröckh's "mad Pilgrimages" are no longer mocked because they are perceived to be a process of "mad fermentation; wherefrom, the fiercer it is, the clearer product will one day evolve itself" (SR, 158). Carlyle's reading of Goethe's autobiography gave him a new insight into the creative experience. Goethe had explained that a work of art emerged slowly and painfully from the depths of the artist's inner life. Before the final clear product could be seen, there had to be a time of fermenting.

From Dichtung und Wahrheit Carlyle also learned that his painful experience as a Son of Time was a necessary part of a larger experience, part of the "rhythm of the world spirit" as it was manifested in nature. In Goethe's cosmology, as Arnold Bergstraesser has described it, "the cycle of life is a threefold movement from alienation, through living in the polarity of existence, toward return to the origin."<sup>23</sup> Carlyle's description of Teufelsdröckh's conversion from a Son of Time to a prophet (one who sees through the garment of time) draws on this Goethean image of a dynamic universe.

Teufelsdröckh's conversion is not like that of Paul of Tarsus, the experience of an instantaneous revelation of light. It happens in three stages: an act of protest, an interval of "indifference," and then the moment of vision. As a Son of Time he moves from the negative pole of dissent, through an intervening area of detachment to the positive pole, the moment of joy when he recognizes the god within him. Psychologically speaking, he moves from defiance, to acceptance, to reverence. He is gradually freed from his skeptical view of man as a creature subjected forever to the conflicting tendencies of the time into which he has been born: the struggle for faith in an age of science.

In the Everlasting No Teufelsdröckh casts off the state of paralysis that afflicts one who doubts everything. The scene is set significantly in Paris, which to Carlyle

was the birthplace of Voltairean skepticism, where "the very Devil has been pulled down, you cannot so much as believe in a Devil" (SR, 164). Here Teufelsdröckh abandons his passive role of helplessness and chooses instead to defy his doubts. He moves from feelings of anxiety to healthy anger, to a productive rage which tells him he is "a Child of Freedom" (SR, 167).

The new, transformed Son of Time moves into the center of indifference (continuing the metaphor in which man is an object impelled by the negative and positive forces of the earth's magnetic field). This is a period of observation and emotional detachment. He travels through space and time, surveying the world with an imperial objectivity that Carlyle (borrowing the simile from Wilhelm Meister) compares to an emperor's journey through his empire (SR, 176). In the great cities of the past he sees the "mysterious live ember of Vital Fire" still miraculously burning. The creative mind is still alive, it lives in the continuing organization of the life of a city, in the countryside's tilled fields and planned roads, and above all in "the last invented . . . the true book" (SR, 172). Cities, roads, the printed book, all bear witness to man's power to give shape and order to reality, the power that is geistig. "All that we do springs out of Mystery, Spirit, invisible Force." Teufelsdröckh learns that the author of books is a kind of City-builder who produces a "wonder-bringing City of the Mind" that is independent of space or time. Goethe's work was the "city"

in which Carlyle lived when he was busy writing Sartor. In June 1831 he wrote to Goethe saying that though Germany was far from Scotland, "Weimar is not distant but near and friendly, a familiar city of the Mind."<sup>24</sup>

As a Son of Time, Teufelsdröckh was a traveller without a goal, a victim persecuted only by his own thoughts. He was an object hurtled back and forth between the opposing poles of skepticism and desire. He was a poet in a utilitarian age. The turning point for him is when he discovers that his life is part of a process.

For his description of Teufelsdröckh's conversion Carlyle drew with great boldness on two very different traditions--two contrasting cities of the mind, the sacred text of the Scriptures and the secular fiction of Wilhelm Meister. He compares Teufelsdröckh's period of suffering to Christ's forty days in the wilderness from which He learns of his mission as a Son of God. But at Teufelsdröckh's actual moment of revelation Goethe's works break through the complex web of allusions of the Bible: "Es leuchte mir ein." Teufelsdröckh repeats Wilhelm's words when he hears the Three outline their doctrine of reverence (WM, II, 82). In this extraordinary climax of his book, Carlyle attempts to reconcile his contradictory heritage of faith and humanism. Teufelsdröckh rejects the old Adam, and he rejects Lord Byron! He rejects the nameless feeling of guilt that comes of "the whim we have of Happiness" (SR, 190).

There are two significant turning points in Wilhelm Meister, two moments when Goethe's hero emerges from his past and accepts a new role. At the end of the Apprenticeship he receives his indentures as a journeyman, and learns, with joy, that he is the father of the boy Felix. It is not this moment, however that Carlyle alludes to at the moment of Teufelsdröckh's conversion. It is the less dramatic moment when Wilhelm is instructed in the beliefs underlying the utopian experiment in male education conducted by the anonymous wise men known as "the Three."

The Three teach that the freedom of natural man is limited by fear, fear which the strong learn to adapt to, but the weak must endure. It is the source of primitive religion. But a favored few are born into every age with a sense of reverence. The threefold theory of reverence that the Three describe to Wilhelm envisages a pattern of psychological growth through which every child ideally should pass. In the first he is taught to reverence what is higher than himself (parents and teachers), and in the second what is lower (the earth beneath his feet which is the source of his nourishment, but also a symbol of pain and toil). In the third stage he learns respect for his fellows, with the human beings with whom he is linked in space and time. He comes to understand the community of men. When a man learns to experience the three kinds of reverence, he can face the world "frank and bold, not selfishly isolated" (WM, II, 265).

Teufelsdröckh's sense of freedom comes when he recognizes "the Godlike that is in Man" (SR, 142). In his moment of revelation, he realizes that this is the message of all religion, the tradition that has been preserved by "sages and martyrs, the Poet and the Priest." He no longer feels "engulphed" in the roaring billows of time; he is no longer a Son of Time.

Carlyle's hero, unlike Goethe's, undergoes an education in reverence. Teufelsdröckh knows the pain of childhood, the child's dependence on those above him, whom he loves and fears. Wilhelm's education is less painful. Unseen friends guide him through "the real world" and help him to discover his vocation. Teufelsdröckh experiences a deeper anguish: he is an apprentice to life who sees no path before him, only a meaningless abyss. Teufelsdröckh's ecstatic revelation of "the God in me" saves him from suicidal despair.

Even more significant is the difference between Wilhelm's education in the meaning of the third reverence and Teufelsdröckh's. When Wilhelm realizes his true vocation, he joins a group of men each of whom has a practical skill to contribute to the good of the whole. But Teufelsdröckh joins a spiritual community, not an earthly one. He discovers his oneness with those who create a city of the mind. It is the vision of himself as one of the company of prophets which is his real revelation. This was Carlyle's real inheritance from Goethe.

What Goethe bequeathed to Carlyle was the saving knowledge that he too labored in "the Ideal Workshop" where the works of the imagination were created. Goethe convinced him that he was no mere literary hack. Thus Teufelsdröckh declares that "Writings of mine . . . have fallen, perhaps not altogether void, into the mighty seed-field of Opinion; fruits of my unseen sowing gratifyingly meet me here and there. I thank the Heavens that I have now found my Calling." He is no longer a frustrated Son of Time but an heir who has succeeded to a great property (SR, 199-200).

In Book II Teufelsdröckh's crisis is described symbolically. It is boldly compared to Christ's temptation in the wilderness which He ended with the words "Agape Satana." The "Everlasting Yea" has a religious significance. But the metaphorical context of Book II indicates that Teufelsdröckh is also rejecting the Childe Harold role of the unhappy wanderer for the role of Goethe himself, the writer who "in passionate words had to write his Sorrows of Werther before the spirit freed herself, and he could become a Man." And the Son of Time motif has yet another meaning. The dominant metaphor throughout Book II is polarity, the movement of the hero from the negative pole of despair to the positive pole of hope. The probable source of this motif is in some aphoristic verses Goethe wrote toward the end of his life:

Eternal rest will only be known  
When pole touches pole.

Now thank God, you Sons of Time  
That he forever separates one pole from another.<sup>25</sup>

Goethe's words are enigmatic; they belong in a series of aphoristic verses whose theme is the mystery of the polarities man discovers in nature. "Tell me the secret of the magnet" writes Goethe, "there is no greater secret than love and hate." Goethe accepted the duality of man's experience as a fact. There was no "rest" in time from the conflict and attraction of opposites. In Sartor, however, Carlyle understood duality in terms of becoming. Teufels-droeckh's story describes a progress from negative to positive, from Byron to Goethe, from Golgotha (the Place of Skulls) to the green seedfield of a productive life. The Son of Time becomes reconciled to the present. "Work while it is called Today," "America is here or nowhere" (SR, 196). Teufelsdroeckh's "glorious revolution" is an exultant yea-saying to present time that echoes the words of Lothario in Wilhelm Meister.

Teufelsdroeckh's voice is the dominant voice in Book II, but in the midst of his most enthusiastic phrases the reader is aware of an ironic counterpoint to his rhapsodies: "Singular Teufelsdroeckh, wouldst thou had told thy singular story in plain words!" The Editor undercuts the poetic enthusiast, sometimes by deprecating remarks on his style, "Nothing but innuendoes, figurative crotchets. A typical

Shadow, fitfully wavering, prophetic-satiric," sometimes with a disparaging comment on his opinions. When Teufelsdröckh boldly declares that the Temple of true religion is in ruins, the Editor quickly intervenes with "nebulous disquisitions . . . yet not without a certain splendour" (SR, 180). Was Carlyle being cautious? Nervous, perhaps, at the expression of such heretical thoughts? Possibly. His deliberate juxtapositions of Teufelsdröckh's wild visions and the Editor's ironic commentary was his method of distancing himself (and his reader) from his hero. What he most admired in Wilhelm Meister was Goethe's detachment from his material. He believed that Goethe deliberately made his hero a "ganache" [a booby].<sup>26</sup> Although the novel was partly autobiographical, Wilhelm certainly did not resemble the poet-hero of Dichtung und Wahrheit.

Like Wilhelm Meister, Sartor has its hidden meanings. The skeptical Editor and the "wild" Teufelsdröckh seem to be two distinct characters, but they actually reflect two aspects of Carlyle himself. Each character exists in a kind of isolation and is only related to the other in the impersonal relationship of anonymous editor and distant author. The reader becomes conscious as he reads of an active intelligence conspiring to mystify him as he puzzles over the meaning of The Philosophy of Clothes, the identity of its author, where he lives and what his destiny may be. Carlyle read Goethe's novel with similar questionings. What was the meaning of the Society of the Tower? Who was the Amazon? What did Mignon symbolize in the hero's life?

Carlyle liked secrets. His characters come close to his life, but they cannot be recognized. They are voices, heard, not seen. His narrative is open-ended. Is Teufelsdröckh in London? Will his book be published? Is there not some subversive meaning in the hero's words, in spite of the Editor's assurance that Teufelsdröckh is no Adamite? (SR, 59-60) The title is enigmatic. There are many allusions to works and writers only obscurely identified. The reader is teased with references to "the Wisest of our Time," the Satanic School, Aesthetic Teas, astrology, German phrases, and a satirical Latin epitaph. Carlyle loved the mystery of Goethe's "allegory" and in Sartor he gleefully manufactured his own.

It is worth recalling at this point Carlyle's defense of Goethe's "parabolic" style in his review of Goethe's "Helena." He noted that while clarity and comprehensibility were vital to works of science and business which were concerned with the exposition of facts, imaginative literature operated according to different laws. The truth of the imagination had its origin in "the secret shrine" of the poet's mind, and took the form imparted to it there. It was not a copy of visible fact. "The face of Agamemnon is not painted but hidden in the old picture: the Veiled Figure at Sais was the most impressive in the Temple" (E, I, 149).<sup>27</sup> His examples imply that truth in art may be too strange, too powerful for ordinary vision. In Schiller's poem "Das Verschleierte Bild zu Sais," the youth who dares

to uncover the enormous veiled statue dies. And in Sartor, Teufelsdröckh states that even facts may be ambivalent: "Facts are engraved Hieroglyphs for which the fewest have the key. And then . . . your Block-head [Dummkopf] studies not their Meaning; but simply whether they are well or ill cut, what he calls Moral or Immoral" (SR, 203). We can be sure that Carlyle did not miss the significance of Goethe's enigmatic title for his autobiography, "From my life, the poetry and the truth."

Throughout Sartor, the Editor (Science, the Understanding) labors to achieve clarity and comprehensibility, while Teufelsdröckh (Poetry, Imagination) speaks in metaphor, indirectly. Sartor interweaves two different approaches to truth. The Editor seeks to build a bridge between German romantic literature and the English reading public. The Poet speaks in symbols, in fragments of discourse, not in logically connected prose. The form of Sartor represents the complex interaction of two opposed artistic techniques.

The subject of the book is two kinds of knowledge: the poet's intuition of a spiritual truth behind the changing world of appearance; the Editor's ironic awareness of the wildness of the poet's vision. Having recorded Teufelsdröckh's ambivalent feelings of defiance and reverence, passivity and energy, he concludes that his hero's dual nature makes him unfit for employment in the world: "he has no portion but Solitude, and a life of Meditation." To the Editor, Teufelsdröckh remains a

wanderer, but one whose journeys are guided by occasional glimpses of "a steady Polar Star" (SR, 206).

If one looks for a "conversion" experience in Goethe's life, one finds it in his flight from the court of Weimar to Italy in 1786. In the sunny Mediterranean world he found a new sense of self. "For the first time I have found myself and am happily in harmony with myself."<sup>28</sup> The turning point in Carlyle's life was not a literal journey to another country but a flight of the imagination, his discovery of a northern poetry and fiction that led him into strange and wonderful "Dream-grottoes." While he wandered in these grottoes, the one constant light before him was Goethe. Richter, Novalis, Schiller--all were admired, but Goethe was his polar star. He formed an ideal image of this contemporary of his whose life seemed the model of a kind of spiritual progress, possibly the only kind that could be made in a utilitarian age. Studying the works of Goethe's imagination taught him to trust his own.

The fictional biography of a philosopher-poet allowed Carlyle's imagination to play on certain powerful themes. Under the guise of an eccentric foreigner, he revealed his desire to be a great writer, a wild soaring ambition that might otherwise have remained hidden in "the secret shrine" of his inner life. The heretofore hidden truth was that he felt himself to be a genius. But only under the mask of Teufelsdröckh could he claim to be the heir of the foremost artist of the age. Through Teufelsdröckh he

achieved a voice of power. He learned that when he spoke in symbol and metaphor he could say what he otherwise might not dare to express.

When the Son of Time accepts his inheritance, the Goethean metaphor describes the metamorphosis of Teufelsdröckh-Carlyle from an uncertain unproductive youth to a man with an accepted role in his society. "Produce. Produce!" He prepares to follow the lead of Goethe's hero Lothario and to cultivate his inherited land (language) as if it were his America. The metaphors and allusions to Wilhelm Meister in Sartor are images of hope, of new life, of creation. In this way Carlyle testified to Goethe's influence in making it possible for him to become a writer. From Goethe's life and his fiction he made emblems of affirmation and acceptance; he cultivated the talent that had been given him.

To inherit land, or a poetic tradition, to cultivate what has been given, what is now, these are themes that seem to reflect a conservative philosophy. But the inheritance that Carlyle celebrates in Book II is the handing on of a spiritual quality--the power to move men with words. He was not talking of the inheritance of social attitudes, as is made clear in Book III, where his theme becomes the need for change.

### iii

Book III presents Carlyle's interpretation of English

history. He begins with George Fox, the quintessential Protestant whose vision of truth leads him to discard conventional apparel (orthodox religion) and to adopt a suit of leather (a religion stripped of all ornament, with no appeal to sensuous pleasure). Fox is emblematic of the religious and social changes that began in the seventeenth century. In contrast to Fox, Carlyle presents the dandy, the man who studies and worships appearance. The dandy's obsession with clothes symbolizes the nineteenth century Englishman's obsession with the mannered presentation of the self to society and his indifference to the truth of his inner feelings. When Teufeldroeckh reappears in Book III, he is no longer a gentle sage but a fierce seer, "Teufelsdroeckh is one of those who consider Society properly called as good as extinct; . . . diabetic, consumptive, can be regarded as defunct; for those spasmodic, galvanic sprawlings are not life" (SR, 232).

The new Teufelsdroeckh has visions of fire and destruction, of ragged clothes bursting into flames, of men suffocated: society itself "the venerable Corpse is to be burnt." Dandies, tailors, all conditions of men are moths (creatures who love cloth) who will be drawn inevitably into the flames that will consume them. "Thus is Teufelsdroeckh content that old sick Society should be deliberately burnt . . . with quite other fuel than spice wood" (SR, 237). He senses the madness of the times, the rising up of "an authentic Demon-Empire" from which something new will emerge (SR, 260).

Teufelsdröckh's wild vision is demonic: he believes in the total destruction of the social order. The Editor notes the seer's calm acceptance of catastrophe with surprisingly little protest. It is here that Carlyle first revealed the "Demon-Empire" buried in his own nature.

Carlyle, like Goethe, was fascinated by the demonic. "The higher a man is," said Goethe, "the more he is under the influence of daemons, and he must take heed lest his guiding will counsel him to a wrong path. . . . The Daemonic is that which cannot be explained by Reason or Understanding; it lies not in my nature, but I am subject to it."<sup>29</sup> Both Goethe and Carlyle saw Napoleon as the outstanding man of their time, the man whose demonic career had challenged the basic assumptions of civilized Europe. Critics of Carlyle, in their concentration on the Goethean motifs of reverence and duty in Sartor, have missed the significance of his portrayal of the demonic drive in his hero, what the Editor calls his "diabolico-angelical Indifference" to the violent changes he anticipates (SR, 235).

Teufelsdröckh's indifference to the possible destruction of his society seems to contradict the concern for an inner sense of order he displayed in Book II. He has changed. His interest now is in the nether forces that boil up and overflow civilized life. The central chapters of Book III focus on his prophecies of fiery destruction, which he describes sometimes as a "slow burning," sometimes as a "fire-whirlwind."

Discussing Napoleon with Eckermann, Goethe declared that the demonic nature was characterized by "unlimited power of action and unrest . . . Daemonic beings of such sort the Greeks reckoned among their demigods."<sup>30</sup> In Sartor, Teufelsdröckh has a strange vision of the "stormy force" that burns in some men:

That warrior on his strong war-horse, fire  
flashes through his eyes; force dwells in  
his arm and heart: but warrior and war-horse  
are a vision; a revealed Force, nothing  
more. Stately they tread the Earth, as if  
it were a firm substance . . . Generation  
after generation takes to itself the Form of  
a Body: and forth-issuing from Cimmerian  
Night on Heaven's mission APPEARS. What  
Force and Fire in each he expends: one grind-  
ing in the mill of Industry; one hunter-like  
climbing the giddy Alpine heights of  
Science; one madly dashed in pieces on the  
rocks of Strife, in war with his fellow.  
(SR, 266)

This is Carlyle's violent image of nineteenth-century Europe, an apocalyptic scene of wild endeavor. The warrior on horseback may well be Napoleon, to whom there are a number of references in Sartor.

The vision changes, however. The poet describes a different scene:

Thus, like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering  
train of Heaven's Artillery does this myster-  
ious MANKIND thunder and flame in long-drawn,  
quick-succeeding grandeur . . . Thus, like a  
God-created fire-breathing Spirit-host, we  
emerge from the Inane; hasten stormfully  
across the astonished Earth; then plunge again  
into the Inane . . . But whence?--O Heaven,  
whither?

The vision of man fighting, working, hunting changes into a transcendental dream, a dream with strange echoes of Goethe's wild words at the end of Dichtung und Wahrheit:

The horses of the sun, as if lashed by invisible spirits, run away with the light chariot of our destiny, and there is nothing for us to do but to courageously grasp the reins and guide the wheels . . . Where it all leads, who knows? One can scarcely remember whence one came.<sup>31</sup>

The last chapter of Goethe's autobiography is about a period of indecision in Goethe's life, when he did not know whether to begin a new life in Weimar or obey his father's wishes and study in Italy. He allowed fate (the unexpected arrival of a messenger) to make the decision, tore himself away from a protesting friend shouting the words quoted above, the exultant cry of Egmont, when he refuses to flee from his enemies. It is difficult to interpret these words in the context of Sartor, words that convey an exultant yielding to the forward impulse of destiny. Carlyle undercuts their positive meaning by quoting the lines from The Tempest that haunted him through his life: "We are such stuff as Dreams are made of . . ." He italicizes "such stuff," drawing back from his vision of spiritual force. The lines are from Shakespeare's last play, the one traditionally interpreted as his farewell to art. Carlyle implies that Teufelsdröckh's vision of man's burning progress through the world has been just a dream, a dream that ends in death. It is a prophetic moment in

Sartor, one in which Carlyle seems to turn away abruptly from his hopes that great and exciting changes are coming, as if he could not let himself believe in them.

Carlyle's demonic self appears only briefly in Sartor-- in his glimpse of the warrior on horseback and of a fire-breathing spirit-host of men who can change the world: "Can the Earth, which is but dead and a vision resist spirits which have reality and are alive?" He turns from the threatening theme of fiery change (his fire is both real and metaphoric) to a calm "recapitulation" of the philosophy of clothes.

When he wrote Sartor, Carlyle believed that the new inner harmony within him had made it possible for him to be a prophet to his disordered society. Goethe's words had given order and meaning to his life. Goethe was his hero. His hero worship is not demonic in Sartor, for it expresses his feeling of reverence for Goethe's serene ability to transcend spiritual conflict both in his life and in his work. Goethe is the prophet "in the vesture, environment, and dialect of this age" (SR, 253). Carlyle avoids placing Goethe in the context of the court of Weimar. I suspect he preferred to ignore this aspect of Goethe's "vesture," one so little in sympathy with his radical opinions. Goethe's wise sayings, (especially in Wilhelm Meister) were for him the ideal "dialect" for the nineteenth century.

He presents Goethe as a kind of secular saint, a man of letters whose "inspired melody" may redeem society in a "rag-burning" time. Goethe is a type of Orpheus, his words a music "that modulates and divinely leads" the natural world. Teufelsdröckh believes in the power of the word to civilize men: "without an Orpheus no city was ever built" (SR, 263).

The music of Orpheus is a minor not a major theme in Sartor, however. The dominant theme of the book is clothes, apparitions, ghosts, illusions, vestures, garments, flesh-- the ambivalent world of appearance that is woven by the "Earth-Spirit" (SR, 268). They are all subject to time. Actually Teufelsdröckh must continue to be a Son of Time, one who moves from pole to pole, from defiance (revolution) to reverence (hero worship). The totality of Sartor expresses Carlyle's rejection of the political forms of his society, and his contempt for its religions. But sounding through his ironic treatment of the wilful illusions of his age one hears a "sphere melody" which expresses his faith in the magic power of words, and his belief in what he had called the "wizard imagination." He was hopeful about the changes he perceived taking place around him, for he felt they symbolized the approach of a new era. He believed that those who were ready for this era would accept the message of Sartor Resartus.

## II

Carlyle's preface to his translation of Wilhelm Meister was what first revealed his interest in a kind of fiction whose meaning was not on the surface, but was hidden. He believed that this kind of a narrative could be appreciated only by the few willing to persevere in pursuit of meaning. Only they would see through the mysterious garment woven by a master of words. As a would-be poet, Carlyle was not interested, was indeed intolerant of fictions in which the characters were recognizable social types familiar to any reader. He was not attracted to characters like Goethe's Lothario, for example, simply because they were enlightened aristocrats with a sense of social responsibility. What excited his imagination were characters who depicted psychological aspects of the mind of the artist. Thus he was fascinated by Goethe's Das Märchen which he translated and published with an introduction and notes by Teufelsdröckh in 1832. Das Märchen, like the tales he had translated for German Romance, was an example of the Dream-grottoes of German imaginative literature: an experiment in a kind of fiction that was not tied to the customs and prejudices of a particular society. Although he read and enjoyed Sir Walter Scott's novels, they were for him a kind of propaganda for the Scottish aristocracy he hated.<sup>32</sup> Goethe's fiction, on the other hand, revealed to him the possibilities of the fictional mode for exploring the inner nature of man.

Teufelsdröckh introduces Das Märchen to English readers as a "Phantasmagoric Poem" (E, II, 450). Thus Carlyle relates it to the fragment from Faust he had discussed in "Goethe's Helena." As in that poetic drama, the characters are not realistic; they are symbolic forms, part of the complex imagery in a narrative that conceals more than it reveals its meaning. He distinguishes this kind of fiction from "common fictitious Narrative," whose images are from the dull world of appearance; the characters of Das Märchen are poetic symbols from the "creative fountain" of Goethe's imagination, a strange blend of the natural world and poetic legend. These "characters" undergo unexpected transformations (the snake becomes a bridge, the youth dies but is restored to life). They represent human faculties (the man with the lamp) or abstract qualities (the Giant who represents gross superstition). For Carlyle, this fiction addressed a higher faculty than the Understanding; it was created by and for "the celestial Reason of Man . . . which manifests itself as the Spirit of Poetry" (E, II, 451). Goethe's fiction was poetry.

As an editor, Teufelsdröckh only hints at the meaning of Goethe's "tale." The veiled vision of truth speaks more powerfully to the imagination than a reasoned argument. His interpretation of Goethe's narrative is tentative, for the meaning of a symbol cannot be measured out in logical prose. He calls it an allegory for an age of transition (E, II, 450).

In the fiction of Wilhelm Meister and Das Märchen

Carlyle discovered techniques suitable for conveying the ideas fermenting in his mind in the late 1820's: the transcendental philosophy of nature that he called Natural Supernaturalism; the drama of his inner life; the mystical influence of one "spirit" upon another; and his belief in the approach of some radical social change in England. He found preeminently in Goethe (although also in some of the other writers he had translated) fictional devices for presenting his perception of truth. Goethe's poetic technique suggested the form that could both contain, and release what he wanted to say.

Carlyle distinguished the phantasmagoric poem from conventional allegory. It differs, Teufelsdröckh explains, in that no one key unlocks its meaning; it cannot be interpreted as if it were Pilgrim's Progress (E, II, 450). The distinction he makes is similar to the distinction Goethe drew between the allegoric mode and the symbolic. In allegory, the phenomenon is transformed into a concept, the concept into an image in such a way that the concept is defined and completely contained by the image. In the symbolic mode, on the other hand, "the idea is transformed into an image in such a way that the idea is continually active and unapproachable in the image, and is ultimately inexpressible."<sup>33</sup> The phantasmagoric poem is in the symbolic mode, Teufelsdröckh explains, "wherein things the most heterogeneous are with homogeneity of figure emblemized forth which would require not one key to unlock it but . . .

a dozen successive keys" (E, II, 449). In allegory, the image has a concrete meaning, but "in the Symbol proper . . . there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite" (SR, 220). Thus a great work of art's meaning is not restricted to what was true at one particular time. In art, as opposed to "a Daub of Artifice," one discerns "Eternity looking through Time . . . thus certain Iliads, and the like, have, in three thousand years, attained quite new significance" (SR, 223-24). Carlyle believed that just as Homer's epic poem still spoke to men, so Goethe's work would be meaningful to men of a different time.

Sartor is Carlyle's phantasmagoric poem in which "things the most heterogeneous" are symbolized, and more than one key must be used to unlock its meanings. Within a loose narrative framework certain events transpire (documents arrive, a book is pieced together, letters are exchanged); some are located in a particular space and time, others in "I know not where" (Weissnichtwo). Some characters belong to the nineteenth century (the Editor, Goethe), others in historical or mythological time (George Fox, Voltaire, Teufelsdröckh, Blumine). The significance of these latter characters is not fixed, but is "continually active." Teufelsdröckh is symbolic not only of the young Carlyle, but also of any young romantic poet, of Werther, of the voice of the imagination, of the prophet of revolution. George Fox is the ideal Protestant hero, a peasant saint, a man

at the beginning of a new age. There is no one key to explain Carlyle's characters.

In the course of this experiment in fiction, Carlyle was discovering his own language. In Sartor he found his own style. He had already sensed that every period in history develops its own distinctive language, or "dialect" as he called it. Voltaire spoke the authentic dialect of the Enlightenment. Goethe developed his distinctive language when he wrote Werther. In Sartor, Carlyle attempted to write a work in which his spiritual odyssey could be seen as emblematic of spiritual experience in his time. The language he created to express his contempt for a dying social order was a strange, wild (these are favorite words of his) amalgam of metaphor and symbol drawn from everything he had read and studied: contemporary science, religion, English history, Rousseau's works, Goethe and Shakespeare, Voltaire, Novalis, Schiller, Richter. These writers are all quoted in Sartor; they also have a role to play as symbolic characters. Shakespeare and Goethe are giant figures whose shadows loom high over the text. Byron is a "dandy of sorrows," Rousseau the apostle of revolution, Richter the comic genius. Voltaire is the representative of an age whose work is finished. But Goethe? Goethe is the most quoted writer in Sartor, but his role is not easy to define.

Goethe's words appear on the title page of Sartor where they announce one of the book's major themes: the

seedfield of time. The text that follows is rife with metaphor and allusions to his work, but the man himself is an emblematic, unnamed figure often referred to simply as "the poet," or "the wisest of this age," one who is of all poets "the greatest living Guild Brother." The effect of this deliberate mystification is to surround Goethe with a kind of Delphic aura. It also serves to tantalize the reader, to set him searching for a clue to the concealed identity. Thus words are used to conceal and reveal. On the other hand, Carlyle chooses to describe Goethe by placing him against his opposites: as a poet he is set against Byron; as a hero he is compared to Voltaire; as a philosopher for the time, he is the counterpart of Rousseau. In the final pages, Teufelsdröckh hails Goethe as the authentic prophet for the age, "I know him and name him-- Goethe" (SR, 253). The statement is unequivocal; the ironic voice of the Editor is silent. Yet, how is one to understand Teufelsdröckh's message when one's last glimpse of the sage is of him moving in a purposeful way towards the revolution of 1830 in France?

Sartor is ambiguous. It both conceals and reveals Carlyle's inner debate as to how he might best articulate what he had to say, whether to limit himself to the role of critic, or to be a creative writer. His Editor is always shadowy, but in Teufelsdröckh Carlyle created a memorable character. Just as Egmont expressed Goethe's confidence in the movement of his destiny, so Teufelsdröckh,

eccentric, "wild," satiric, represents Carlyle's joy in the life of the imagination, and the creative excitement he found in using language. Sartor, Carlyle's most creative work, demonstrates the freedom of his imagination to play with fact--the facts of his own biography. It is also his success story, built around his discovery that he could be a great writer. His study of Goethe--of Faust, Egmont, Dichtung und Wahrheit, Wilhelm Meister--gave him the courage to explore his own nature and to accept the contradictions he found there without guilt.

Carlyle's debt to Goethe is therefore more than a moral one. In discussing the influence of Goethe on Carlyle, critics have focused on the moral imperative he found in Wilhelm Meister. "Le Goethe qui domine le débat . . . c'est l'auteur de Wilhelm Meister. On ne se demande pas ce que vaut le poète, mais ce que vaut le moraliste."<sup>34</sup> G. B. Tennyson comments, "It has been somewhat overstressed, but C. F. Harrold rightly places the burden of influence on the concept of Entsagen."<sup>35</sup> In thus emphasizing the theme of Bildung (and sometimes attempting to place Sartor in the genre of Bildungsroman), critics have ignored Carlyle's response to the play of Goethe's imagination. To the incipient artist of words, Goethe's enigmatic fictions were "a creative fountain." Their very strangeness and ambiguity, far from repelling him, made him aware of what fiction might be. Their dream-like quality stirred him more than his reading (enjoyable enough) of Fielding and Sterne. After

reading Goethe, Carlyle realized that he had a tale to tell too. And in telling that tale he did not need to be confined to the manner and the voice of conventional English fiction. Goethe's voice told him of the poet who passes "the dream of life like one awake . . . and is at once a teacher, a prophet, a friend of gods and men" (WM, I, 92). He spoke to the poet in Carlyle and inspired him to write Sartor.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup>Corr. Goethe & Carlyle, p. 14.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 34.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 210-11.
- <sup>5</sup>Note Books, p. 177.
- <sup>6</sup>Corr. Goethe & Carlyle, p. 279.
- <sup>7</sup>Note Books, pp. 162-63.
- <sup>8</sup>Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, ed. C. R. Sanders, Kenneth J. Fielding, Ian Campbell, John Clubbe (Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press), VI, 396. Hereafter the reference will be to Collected Letters.
- <sup>9</sup>Note Books, p. 183.
- <sup>10</sup>J. W. Cross, George Eliot's Life Related in Her Letters, 3 vols. (1884; rpt. Grosse Pointe: Scholarly Press, 1968), I, 378-79.
- <sup>11</sup>Note Books, p. 183.
- <sup>12</sup>Carlyle's preface to Wilhelm Meister, I, 6.
- <sup>13</sup>G. B. Tennyson, Sartor Called Resartus, The Genesis, Structure, and Style of Thomas Carlyle's First Major Work. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 72.
- <sup>14</sup>The Autobiography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, trans. John Oxenford. 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), II, 172.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., II, 217.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., II, 214.
- <sup>17</sup>Thomas Carlyle, Reminiscences, ed. J. A. Froude (New York: Harper Bros., 1881), p. 248.
- <sup>18</sup>Goethe: Selected Verse, ed. David Luke (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 276.
- <sup>19</sup>Autobiography, II, 209.

<sup>20</sup>Ralph Freedman, The Lyrical Novel, Studies in Herman Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press., 1967), p. 25. "The hero in a transcendental novel . . . is a passive purveyor of visions. Friedrich Schlegel had identified this hero even with Wilhelm Meister, noting in one of his fragments that a novel is actually a personification of an entire life, an encyclopedia of a man of genius."

<sup>21</sup>In his edition of Sartor, C. F. Harrold notes that in Wilhelm Meister Jarno addresses Wilhelm as "Thou second Diogenes!" (SR, 8). Perhaps Carlyle also had noted that during the troubled years of the 1790's when Goethe and Schiller joined together in dedicating themselves to "the aesthetic life" Goethe saw himself in the role of the philosopher Diogenes. Karl Vietor, Goethe the Poet (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), p. 199.

<sup>22</sup>J. W. Goethe, Werke (Hamburger Ausgabe 1948-60), III, 107.

<sup>23</sup>Arnold Bergstraesser, Goethe's Image of Man and Society (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1949), p. 138.

<sup>24</sup>Corr. Goethe & Carlyle, p. 279.

<sup>25</sup>Goethe, Werke, VIII, 155.

<sup>26</sup>Love Letters, I, 339.

<sup>27</sup>Jacques Cabau drew my attention to the significance of Carlyle's reference to the veiled figure at Sais in Thomas Carlyle ou le Prométhée enchainé (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), p. 38.

<sup>28</sup>Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 154.

<sup>29</sup>J. P. Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, ed. J. K. Moorhead, trans. John Oxenford (New York: Everyman, 1970), p. 304, 392.

<sup>30</sup>Conversations with Goethe, p. 392.

<sup>31</sup>Autobiography, II, 437.

<sup>32</sup>Note Books, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup>Goethe, Werke, XII, 470-71.

<sup>34</sup>Carré, Goethe en Angleterre, p. xiii.

<sup>35</sup>G. B. Tennyson, Sartor called Resartus, p. 72.

## CHAPTER III

## The Mask of Sauerteig

When Carlyle completed Sartor, he knew that he had written an important book, and immediately took steps to promote his "strange" creation. He left Craigenputtoch for London to talk to possible publishers. But in the fall of 1831 no one was interested, "everything stagnating because of this Reform Bill," as he wrote to his mother.<sup>1</sup> The circumstances of Sartor's rejection were humiliating to one who had hoped to astonish his contemporaries by bursting upon them with a bold and original work. Even by 1834, Sartor's only admirers were Emerson and an obscure Irish critic. Carlyle tasted failure in London's indifference to his genius. It was galling to him to find that politics were more important to men like John Murray than a new work of literature.

During the months that Sartor languished in manuscript form Carlyle continued to work as a book reviewer. In the course of reviewing J. W. Croker's edition of Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson he examined the reasons for the popularity of biography and concluded that the genre not only had a practical appeal but a poetic one. The story of a man's life recorded the struggle of "Freewil" against

material Necessity (the practical appeal of biography). If the record of this struggle awakens "sympathy," the reader discovers "a new world," a veil is removed when he sees "the image of his own natural face and the supernatural secrets that prophetically lie under the same" (E, III, 44-45). Biography will reveal the truth that lies underneath the conventional appearance of its subject. Carlyle had discovered that biography could be a work of the imagination.

In "Biography" Carlyle ascribed some of the more startling of his new opinions to a new character he had invented, one Professor Gottfried Sauerteig, a name with suggestively radical connotations [Sauerteig means leaven or yeast]. Although he was not writing fiction, he was continuing to experiment with literary personae. It has been pointed out that of the thirteen essays and translations he wrote between the summer of 1831 and the publication of Sartor in Fraser's in 1833, a good seven involved the use of an "eccentric observer of life and letters."<sup>2</sup> Sauerteig appeared in "Biography," and then in the two essays on Cagliostro.

Sauerteig is a provocative commentator, full of original and surprising statements. He announces that Rousseau's Confessions is an "elegiaco-didactic Poem." He argues that Homer, to the extent that he did not really believe in the Greek gods, was "a partially hollow and false singer" (E, III, 49-50). Sauerteig goes so far as to say that all the epics since Virgil are "artificial gum-flowers" because

their authors did not believe in the divine beings who played an active role in their plots.

In "Corn-Law Rhymes" Carlyle appears in the guise of a critic named Smelfungus Redivivus and protests at having to review poetry at a time when real poetry is not being read, published, or even written (E, III, 136). Under the mask of Smelfungus he felt free to say what he thought. But it was in "Count Cagliostro" that he became really bold, and claimed that, according to Professor Sauerteig, "the life of every man . . . even of the meanest . . . is a Poem" (E, III, 249). He then proceeded to write the life story of a notorious confidence man.

It seems clear that "humorous" characters, like Teufelsdröckh, Sauerteig, and Smelfungus, with their grotesque or foreign names, gave Carlyle a sense of freedom when it came to expressing his "wild" ideas. He could speak in a voice quite different from the polite, subdued tones expected of a writer for serious periodicals such as the Edinburgh Review, or even Fraser's. His two essays on the life of Cagliostro show him giving a free rein to his imagination: he, the lover of truth, is writing with extraordinary zest the story of a liar.

Carlyle was not the first writer to find in Cagliostro's story a significance beyond mere scandal. His career had fascinated both Schiller and Goethe. Carlyle alludes to Schiller's unfinished novel Geisterseher and to Goethe's play Der Gross Kophta (E, III, 258), but he took nothing

from either one. Goethe's play was not a success when it was performed in 1790, perhaps because his hero, the mock Count (Cagliostro), demonstrated how vulnerable the upper classes were to an eloquent impostor. Goethe told Eckermann that the play did not please the public because Cagliostro's kind of crime made them feel "apprehensive." He thought that the play's subject was historically significant because it showed the aristocracy becoming contemptible.<sup>3</sup> The focus of Carlyle's biographical essay is not, however, on those who are duped by Cagliostro but on the man himself. It is a highly imaginative portrait of a scoundrel who makes his way from the back streets of Palermo to the salons of French and German noblemen. Carlyle enjoys himself describing this career; he positively exults in Cagliostro's grotesque appeal, in what he calls his "vulpine astucity," his "heartiness" and "oiliness so plausible-looking" (E, III, 267). He detects behind this "oiliness" an immense hunger: the king of quacks is driven by his "Power to eat" (E, III, 262).

Why did Carlyle call this biographical narrative a poem? He calls on Herr Sauerteig to explain. It is Sauerteig who makes the claim that biography can be a work of imagination which belongs in the high region of art. The biographer writes a kind of poem when he creates a life from the bare skeletal facts that are found in the records. "Count Cagliostro" is a creative "flight" in two parts; it soars on the twin pinions of "stem Accuracy"

(the quotations from the documents of the Roman Inquisition), and "bold Imagination" which expounds and fills up the bare outline of fact (E, III, 259-60). Imagination creates, so to speak, a body of truth.

According to Sauerteig, there are three main kinds of biography: heroic, idyllic, satiric (E, III, 250). He is surely echoing Schiller's classification of sentimental poetry according to three modes of perception.<sup>4</sup> Cagliostro's story must be of the satiric kind, a "flesh-and-blood Poem of the purest Pasquil sort" (E, III, 253). This ingenious theory permitted Carlyle to write an audacious, light-hearted celebration of the King of Quacks, in which he could fantasize about his childhood, the education he acquired on the streets of Naples, and his early apprenticeship to crime in a monastery. He speculates mischievously on how Cagliostro advanced from faith healer to Free Mason, to "Count," the friend of princes and a French cardinal. This anti-hero is driven by an immense greed; he succeeds (temporarily) because he feeds on a society which has lost belief in its institutions: medical, religious, and social.

Carlyle seems to glory in the fame and success of his quack hero. He had found an appropriate symbol of a society on the brink of revolution. He created a lively satiric image with which he could safely attack (who can deny that Cagliostro was a quack?) the gullibility of aristocrats, leaders of the church, and of men and women of

rank and station in general. He invites his readers to look at his pasquil "mystically." Behind the celebration of the Quack of Quacks is a hidden meaning they may discover. They have to interpret for themselves the metaphor he has offered them.

This experiment did not succeed with Fraser's readers. When he wished to follow up "Cagliostro" with its sequel, the story of the Diamond Necklace, editors were cool. One might hazard a number of reasons. First, the best part of the satire, his lively portrait of the young Cagliostro's rise in crime, is obscured, almost lost in the tangled web of Sauerteig's reflections on biography, and the narrator's frequent self-conscious comments on his technique. The narrative is loaded with parenthetical comments, rhetorical questions, apostrophes, and obscure poetic figures such as the image of a "stern Avatar of Democracy hymning its world-thrilling birth and battle-song" (E, III, 270). Carlyle's prose seems recklessly self-indulgent. Secondly, the focus of the satire is on European life; the butts of his humor are monks, friars and policemen; French aristocrats; he makes fun of Catholic shrines and the "Egyptian lodges," of Free Masons in France and Germany. For some reason, Carlyle failed to find good satirical copy from Cagliostro's visits to England. So the successes of his mock-hero failed to touch the English seat of quackery, where it might hurt! In this satirical biography, Carlyle was too

successful in distancing his material. He did not bring his satire home to his readers.

In the privacy of his journal, Carlyle brooded over his unpopularity, and continued to have doubts about his vocation. "Bedenklichkeiten [doubts] of all kinds environ me. To be true or not to be true: there is the risk. And then to be popular or not to be popular? That, too, is a question that plays most completely with the other."<sup>5</sup>

One notes that his desire to be "true" to himself seemed to be in conflict with a longing for popular success. The English reading public had not responded to his enthusiasm for Goethe. Was his sense that he might not be true to himself a reflection of the fact that he was turning away from the Germans, and looking for another subject?

Certain events came together and made him feel a vulnerable Son of Time in more literal sense. Early in 1832 old James Carlyle died, and two months later he received the news of Goethe's death. He wrote his brother that he felt as if he had lost a father for a second time: "He was to me a kind of Spiritual Father."<sup>6</sup>

Did being "true" to himself mean having the courage to explore further the theme of revolution, the theme that he had only hinted at in Sartor? At this time, Carlyle began to immerse himself in documents about the French revolution. Only lack of money kept him from going himself to France in the winter of 1833. It was to John Stuart Mill (who supplied him with many books on France) that he first

admitted that he was thinking of doing something with this material. "A great result lies in these so intensely interesting Narratives; and might, had one the faculty, be drawn out of them; this were what I should call the highest kind of writing, far higher than any kind of Fiction even of the Shakespeare sort."<sup>7</sup> As had happened with Cagliostro, the factual accounts of actual life kindled Carlyle's imagination and roused him to try once more "the highest kind of writing." Memoirs and biographies made the past alive to him. He lamented the fact that with the exception of Boswell's Life of Johnson there was no great biography in English, while the French and the Germans had produced a number that ranked as literature: in France Rousseau's, and in Germany those of Goethe, Schubart and Jung Stilling (E, III, 60). Why was it that contemporary writing lacked "authenticity"? He believed that it was because British authors did not know the "open secret" (E, III, 58). "The Universe of Man and Nature is still quite shut-up from them; . . . no sympathy with Man or Nature, no love and free simplicity of heart has yet unfolded the same." They wrote without feeling or insight into the human situation.

The touchstone of the "open secret" is one of Carlyle's hidden references to Goethe.<sup>8</sup> When he accused English writers of not knowing this secret he meant that their vision of "reality" was so limited that they mistook the changing world of appearance for truth. In effect, they did not understand the meaning of Teufelsdröckh's

Philosophy of Clothes: that the beliefs and institutions of nineteenth century England were not eternal realities; they were perishable, inflammable garments woven on the loom of time. The open secret and the loom of time<sup>9</sup> were to be key metaphors in Carlyle's prose through the 1830's. He had found them both in Goethe's poetry. The loom of time appeared on the opening pages of Sartor, in "The Diamond Necklace" and reappears, at significant moments, in The French Revolution.

As Carlyle studied the documents of the revolution, he noted that "gleams . . . of a work of art hover past me; as if this should be a work of art."<sup>10</sup> He felt that he could write something memorable. He was deterred from engaging in the hurlyburly of contemporary journalism by the example of Diderot, whose works he reviewed for The Foreign Quarterly in 1833. Diderot he judged to have been a man who could have been an artist but who became instead an "Encyclopedic Artisan" (E, III, 242). As far as Carlyle was concerned, the significance of the Encyclopedia was past; and Diderot's years of "Works Polemical" had been wasted on matters of ephemeral importance. Carlyle's lofty ambition was to reach beyond the ephemeral; so he rejected Edward Sterling's offer of a job writing for the Times.

Carlyle's continuing references to such important Goethean metaphors as "the open secret" and "the Loom of Time" show how Goethe's transcendental view of fact as symbolic truth continued to be important to him. It is

interesting to see how he returns to Goethe in the conclusions of the essays he writes in the 1830's. The references are indirect, not specific. He concluded the long essay on Diderot by quoting this passage from "the Thinker of our time":

The special, sole and deepest theme of the World's and Man's History, whereto all other themes are subordinated, remains the conflict of UNBELIEF AND BELIEF. ALL Epochs wherein Belief prevails . . . are splendid, heart-elevating, fruitful for contemporaries and posterity. All epochs . . . wherein Unbelief, maintains its sorry victory, should they even for a moment glitter with a sham splendor, vanish from the eyes of posterity; because no one chooses to burden himself with study of the unfruitful.

He used a passage from Goethe's essay "Israel in the Wilderness"<sup>11</sup> to dismiss the achievement of the Enlightenment. It is ironic that he should have used Goethe's words to condemn the philosophes because they had rejected the Christian religion. (That is the thrust of Carlyle's criticism of Diderot.) He chose to ignore the fact that Goethe's references to Christianity had not always been as respectful as they were in Wilhelm Meister. He did not choose to confront the Goethe who wrote, "How mankind loves bungling. I almost believe the myth that tells me that I myself am a bungled creature," "I can stand a great deal. I put up with most objectionable things calmly, as a god commands me. There are a few, however, that I really hate like adder's fangs--four things: tobacco-smoke, bugs, garlic, and a Christian."<sup>12</sup>

At the end of "Count Cagliostro" Carlyle imagines an indignant reader asking, "What good was in it?" Why should his time be taken with the biography of such a "miscreant"? (E, III, 317). Scoffing at this naive request for a "moral lesson," Carlyle defends his unconventional biography by an appeal to Sauerteig's authority: "It is stated on the very threshold of this matter in loftiest terms by Herr Sauerteig that the Lives of all Eminent Persons, miscreant or creant, ought to be written." The mask of Sauerteig permitted him to laugh at the "foolish" reader's expectation that every story should have a moral, and to invite him instead to read his satire with his "whole mind," not just from the narrow point of view of a moralist, to "look at it not logically only, but mystically." He asked him to read with his imagination.

This turned out to be the last appearance of Sauerteig. Carlyle continued to use literary personae in his prose, usually such neutral masks as "one" or "the Poet." At the conclusion of "The Diamond Necklace," however, he assumed the mask of the Arch-Quack himself while supposedly reporting a prophecy delivered by Cagliostro from his prison in the Bastille. Under this guise he launched a stinging attack on the middle class morality that constrained him and his readers:

The grand problem, Fellow Scoundrels, . . .  
is the marrying of Truth and Sham: so that  
they become one flesh, man and wife, and  
generate these three: Profit, Pudding, and

Respectability that always keeps her  
Gig.

(E, III, 394)

He followed up this by describing Cagliostro's vision of the end of the "EMPIRE OF IMPOSTURE," "One Red-sea of Fire, wild-billowing enwraps the World; with its fire-tongue licks at the very Stars. Thrones are hurled into it . . . Prebendal Stalls that drop fatness, . . . all the Gigs of Creation: all, all!" (E, III, 399). Under the cover of the mask of Cagliostro Carlyle felt free to express one of his wildest dreams: a revolution that would destroy everything he despised in English society, kings, bishops, and all those who hypocritically deferred to them.

Teufelsdröckh, Sauerteig, and Cagliostro were masks that concealed a man who felt compelled to speak. Carlyle was probably frightened by some of his thoughts, especially his dreams of fire and destruction. The passionate outpourings of Cagliostro tell us more of the hidden Carlyle than he wanted his respectable reader to know. Sauerteig represented what Jacques Cabau calls "la bonne fermentation intérieure."<sup>13</sup> After speaking through these masks, Carlyle concluded his experiment in satirical biography with a few words in the moral, careful language of Thomas Carlyle. Reminding his reader that he lived in a world of Quacks, public and private, he noted the best a man could do was "Understand it, despise it, love it; cheerfully hold on thy way through it, with thy eye on higher loadstars."

A "mystical" reading tells us that Goethe was still Carlyle's "loadstar," the guiding presence that sustained him as he wrote.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>Collected Letters, V, 436.

<sup>2</sup>Tennyson, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Conversations with Goethe, p. 383.

<sup>4</sup>Schiller, pp. 116-25.

<sup>5</sup>J. A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle, A History of the First Forty Years (New York: Scribners, 1882), II, 362.

<sup>6</sup>Collected Letters, VI, 143.

<sup>7</sup>Letters of Carlyle to J. S. Mill, Sterling and Robert Browning, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London: T. Unwin, 1923), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup>"The Open Secret" (Offenbar Geheimnis) is the title of a poem in Goethe's West-östliche Divan about the mystical eastern poet Hafiz. In "The Death of Goethe" Carlyle defined the true poet as a seer who "sees into the greatest of secrets, 'the open secret'; hidden things become clear; how the Future (both resting on Eternity) is but another phasis of the Present." (E, III, 377). In "The Hero as Poet" Goethe's open secret is identified with Fichte's "Divine Idea of the World, that which lies at the bottom of Appearance." (H, 163).

<sup>9</sup>The "Loom of Time" occurs in the song of the Earth-spirit in Faust I, 501-09.

<sup>10</sup>Froude, II, 359.

<sup>11</sup>Goethe, Werke III, 504-05.

<sup>12</sup>Goethe, Selected Verse, 118-19.

<sup>13</sup>Cabau, p. 97.

## CHAPTER IV

## Fiery Mirabeau

From 1834-37 Carlyle was busy writing The French Revolution, the subject that had been waiting for his attention from the time he made Teufelsdröck vanish from Weissnichtswo after learning of the "Parisian Three Days." His approach was through biography, through the lives and memoirs of men and women with immediate experience of the events. But he did not write biography, he wrote history.

The decision to write a history of the most traumatic event in the memory of his contemporaries was a significant one for Carlyle. It showed he had moved beyond the influence of his "spiritual father." Goethe's attempts to write about the Revolution were not successful. In the 1790's, he wrote a series of plays that were inspired by the events in France. Three of them were never finished, and one, "The Gross Kopta," was not well received. Erich Auerbach notes that among Goethe's works that touch in any way on the Revolution "all have one thing in common: they avoid entering into the dynamic forces at work . . . as soon as the whole is at issue, Goethe turns to generalities and ethical principles . . . in a spirit of cheerfully pessimistic worldly and political wisdom."<sup>1</sup> From the beginning Goethe was appalled at the violent upheaval in

France. "It is true that I could be no friend to the French Revolution," he told Eckermann, "its horrors were too near me, and shocked me daily and hourly, whilst its benefits were not then apparent."<sup>2</sup> He feared that the Germans might try "artificially" to carry out a similar seizure of power. While Carlyle was no "friend" to revolution, he saw it as an explosion of natural forces that had too long been repressed. He looked beyond the fate of individuals to discover the "dynamic forces at work."

Carlyle's interest in both biography and history indicate his concern with the origins, the beginnings of things. Before the book, there was the man. What kind of man appears at the beginning of a revolution? One answer was a Cagliostro. Another answer was--Mirabeau. As he read the memoirs and documents of the revolution, he looked for emblematic figures, men whose character and life could be seen as symbols of the meaning of events. The facts of the life of Mirabeau "by their very newness and strangeness . . . provoke prophecy" (E, III, 403).

Carlyle considered that there were three "original" men of the revolution: Napoleon, Danton and Mirabeau (E, III, 409). In the summer of 1836, before he had finished The French Revolution, he wrote a remarkable essay on Mirabeau. From his French sources, he had learned certain facts about Mirabeau, that he had been a man whose sheer physical presence had startled and impressed his contemporaries; his gigantic stature, his well-known indifference

to conventional mores made him the outstanding figure at the meeting of the Estates General. Here was a "memorable" man whose appearance had heralded revolution. Carlyle knew two important things about Mirabeau: that he was "strong," and that he was a believer, a man who trusted his intuitions.

The Mirabeau essay is not so much a biography describing the events of Mirabeau's life as a vivid portrait of a man who symbolized the creative force behind the revolution. It is an exciting, imaginative description of a man who seemed to Carlyle to have been larger than life, a man whose defiance of his father, his king, and his class anticipated the social and political breakdown that took place in France. In Carlyle's eyes, he epitomized the revolution.

To present this emblematic man, Carlyle employs techniques similar to those he had used to describe Teufelsdröckh. His poetic epithets bring out the transcendental significance of his central figure. Mirabeau is a Hercules, an Alcides-Mirabeau (E, III, 447). Epithets and metaphors emphasize Mirabeau's physical and intellectual strength: "il a humé toutes les formules" (E, III, 445). They provide the dominant motif in the essay. Mirabeau is a Hercules who proves himself superior to everything that threatens him. He boldly "consumes" the sexual and social traditions that other men must submit to. He does not allow his life to be contained by the formulas of the past. His bold appetite for personal freedom embodies revolution-

ary protest. Carlyle portrays a romantic rebel.

As in Sartor, the images that describe the hero are metaphors that give a powerful resonance to the central theme. The most effective are the metaphorical description of revolution as a swallowing up of old formulas (Carlyle found the metaphor in the Mirabeau memoirs) and the comparison of the revolutionary acts of the French people to the Titans' rebellion against their father Zeus. This comparison makes Mirabeau a kind of demigod who erupted into modern history. (Mme. de Stael saw him as a Samson.) It implies that the political upheaval in France expressed the rebellious feelings of powerful, god-like men. The essay on Mirabeau romanticizes revolution by picturing one of its leading protagonists as a demonic figure filled with Promethean fire. Carlyle speaks of Mirabeau as a "wild-glowing mass of life" (E, III, 464). His life is "blasted and thunder-riven" (E, III, 469); he is a "roaming, unresting, rebellious Titan of a Count" (E, III, 470).

The essay on Mirabeau is a prologue to The French Revolution. It indicates how Carlyle would make mythical figures out of the leading statesmen of the early days of the revolution. His cosmic imagery of fire and thunderbolts transforms mere men into vivid symbols representing the powerful forces of nature. The imagery which turns Mirabeau into an almost supernatural figure, "a 'god-devil'"

(E, III, 479), makes the revolution seem an act of nature, an explosion of volcanic energy that cannot be suppressed. This is the thrust of Carlyle's essay. True, he briefly develops another theme by depicting a melancholy Mirabeau, a lost Ishmael who is ruined "outwardly" but not "inwardly." He stands alone because "the world is his enemy" (E, III, 468). There is a premonition here of Carlyle's later years when he would believe that the strong man is fated to stand alone in the midst of an indifferent world. But in 1836 he strikes this minor chord briefly and then returns to his major theme.

There is yet another similarity in this extraordinary essay to the poetic technique in Sartor. We have seen that Teufelsdröckh and the Editor are counterparts of one another: the German professor representing Carlyle's imaginative self, the Editor his skeptical self. Carlyle employs dramatic contrast of this sort again when he places Mirabeau beside Goethe: they are two great men born in the same year, 1749. (At the same time he cannot help noting that they are near contemporaries of the peasant-poet Robert Burns.) But where he describes Mirabeau in Promethean fire metaphors, he sees Goethe as a sun that shines serenely far above the chaos of mortal life. They were both men of light, but they shone in different spheres. Mirabeau was a demigod who "can but Titanically vanquish or be

vanquished by the world . . . instead of light (stillest and strongest of things) we have but lightning." A Titan's fire is inferior to a poet's.<sup>3</sup> Carlyle looks back to Wilhelm Meister for a definition of a poet. "Who but the poet first formed gods for us, brought them down to us, raised us up to them?" (WM, I, 114).

Two different aspects of genius are shown in the Mirabeau-Goethe comparison. One is the genius of rebellion, the other the genius of poetry. Carlyle implies that poetry does not draw on hidden, demonic fires that are concealed deep in man's being; rather it belongs to an upper region of air, not a dark region of fire and earth. In this essay, two contrasting aspects of genius do not occur as different aspects of one man's psyche. They are embodied in two quite different men whose lives follow quite opposed courses. In a time of revolution, demonic genius is dominant; it swallows up traditional formulas; the past is consumed. Poetic genius, which creates gods (religion) and the poetry that celebrates gods is, as it were, recessive in such an age. The poet will only be recognized in an age which lives within established forms, not one that is at work destroying them. Poetry requires the order and serenity of accepted forms. Poetry then will be a victim of social change.

Mirabeau was the "Original man" at the beginning of the revolution. He died in 1789, the year the volcano erupted. Carlyle did not write essays on the other "Original" men of the Revolution. His portrait of Danton is in the

second part of his history. He was never to write a separate monograph on Napoleon, but he pauses in "Mirabeau" to repeat what he had said in Sartor (SR, 178) that he considered Napoleon to be a "divine missionary" who "preached through the cannon's throat that great doctrine la carrière ouverte aux talents . . . . [the career open to (the) talents] our ultimate Political Evangel" (E, III, 409-410). This is enough to establish him as an emblematic figure, a man whose life cries out to be interpreted by the poetic imagination. When he wrote about Goethe's death, he placed Napoleon beside Goethe. They are the outstanding men of their time. But he never developed this poetic contrast. And he chose to close The French Revolution as Napoleon steps forward on the stage.

"Mirabeau" was published in the London and Westminster Review in January, 1837, and, according to Mill it was "the most popular article we ever had in the review."<sup>4</sup> From Concord, Massachusetts came a "flaming letter" from Emerson (the description is Carlyle's) claiming that with this piece Carlyle had established his kingdom in England. "That is genuine thunder . . . I please myself with thinking that my Angelo has blocked a Colossus."<sup>5</sup> Mill and Emerson recognized Carlyle's ability at a moment when he felt very alone. The two played an important role in encouraging him to continue writing. These were the years when he and Mill were close friends. Mill tried to persuade him to simplify the style of "Mirabeau," but Carlyle was adamant.

He could not and would not write conventional prose, prose designed for the Understanding. He wrote for the imagination: "the great business for me . . . is recording the presence, bodily concrete coloured presence of things."<sup>6</sup> The history he was to write would be a symbolic vision of dramatic scenes and characters. His genius, as he well knew, lay not in the development of an argument, or in elaborate theorizing. It lay in his image-making capacity, his seer's gift for transforming concrete images from the world of facts into metaphors, into emblematic pictures. That, after all, was what he had admired in Wilhelm Meister.

In The French Revolution, Carlyle continued to use the same kind of metaphors that were so effective in the Mirabeau essay. In Part I, he drew from the myths of ancient Greece two powerful images to convey the meaning of the violent social disruption in France: the struggle of the Titans against their father Uranus, and the orgiastic violence of the "Menads" [sic]. From the world of nature, he drew images of fire and water to describe political change in terms of the natural disasters of flood and volcanic eruption. And before each of the three sections he placed an epigraph from Goethe's poetry, brief lines of significant metaphor.

In the essays on Cagliostro and Mirabeau, the imagination of Carlyle had transformed men who were his near-contemporaries into emblematic figures. He examined history with "Prophetic eyes" so that the characters and the events of

the preceding age became fictional images in a great narrative (FR, I, 135). As he explained in his second chapter, to "the eye of History" many things are now visible which were invisible to those who were living at the time (FR, I, 5). "The whole future is there . . . in the hearts and unshaped thoughts of these men." Historic events emerge from the unconscious depths of living men.

The narrative in Part I builds toward two memorable scenes: the great procession of the States General in which Mirabeau is the cynosure of all eyes, and the insurrection of the women. The long parade of 1400 men who came together at the meeting of the three estates is viewed with a double vision. There is the "esurient advocate" Danton, who the prophetic eye sees will become a Hercules of the Revolution (FR, I, 136). There is a "greenish-colored advocate from Arras" who will become the tyrant Robespierre; and there is the king-like figure of Mirabeau whose "burning fire of genius" shines through the surrounding chaos (FR, I, 137). Once again, Mirabeau is described as a Promethean man whose gift is to bring fire. His books are compared to a "bituminous alarum fire" (FR, I, 139). He is a man of no system, "only a man of instincts and insights . . . who will glare fiercely on any object . . . see through it, and conquer it." He is "the Pharos and Wonder-sign of an amazed Europe" (FR, I, 141). Mirabeau is the burning signal that announces that revolution has begun. The actual man Mirabeau was to die of natural causes only a few

months after this scene. But to prophetic eyes, he is the significant man in the great procession, towering over Danton, Robespierre et al.

The exciting effect of Carlyle's description comes from its brilliant visual metaphors and its prophetic allusions to the hidden future. He makes his reader view the scene with a special perception, seeing not only the ugly, swarthy Mirabeau but the "fiery figure" who will live in men's imaginations. Carlyle does not prove by logical argument that Mirabeau is the man of this time. He establishes this "fact" by a series of metaphors, by images of fire, burning volcanoes, the light of the great Pharos of Alexandria, and of the Titan who brought fire to mankind.

Carlyle knew that the motive behind the insurrection of women was simple hunger. He sets the scene by first describing a banquet that took place at Versailles the night before, a dinner "harmless" enough in ordinary time, but in 1789 "fatal as that of Thyestes." The rich are eating their own people. The mob that the women of Paris raise up is "a genuine outburst of nature" whose noise is the roar of human hunger (FR, I, 251). At first Carlyle's tone in this episode borders on the mock heroic. The mob is said to gather with its ancient virgins and housemaids with brooms. He salutes them as "Judiths" as they tuck up their gowns, and armed with rusty pistols (without ammunition) surge through the streets of Paris. But the

Judiths become Maenads, "Bacchantes in these ultimate Formalized Ages" (FR, I, 255). A crowd of modern women become wild, savage creatures, like those terrible women of ancient times who "hewed off the melodious head of Orpheus."

The violent mobs of the French revolution caught Carlyle's imagination. He learned that desperate hunger could drive the mild, domestic nurturing sex to the mindless brutalities of the women's march on Versailles. Hunger could transform the civilized into a raving army thirsting for blood. The documents of the revolution had given him the same message as accounts of the Holocaust have given to the present generation. The thin veneer of civilization can disappear quickly; ordinary French women driven by "Menadic hunger" would arm themselves with "pike-thyrsi."

His use of the myth of the Maenads is extraordinarily effective. It is more than a literary device to suggest wild, screaming women. The allusion to the Maenads' dismembering of the body of Orpheus deepens the significance of the comparison. Orpheus was the poet whose music stilled trees, quieted animals, soothed the sea. As Carlyle begins his description of the civil anarchy that breaks out in France, he longs for Orpheus' lyre "to constrain with touch of melodious strings these mad masses into Order" (FR, I, 270). But Orpheus was destroyed by the Maenads. Carlyle's sinister message is that in a time of revolution Orpheus (poetry-society-beauty) cannot survive. The life

of imagination will be annihilated with pike-thyrsis (a reference to the conventional depiction of the Maenads on Greek vases).

Thus Carlyle achieved some of his most powerful effects not by realistic reporting of the events of 1789-90 but by a description rich in allusions to myth and poetry. In Part I the chief sources of his mythic treatment were Greek. He chose to surround his text with epigraphs from Goethe's poetry.

The epigraphs before Part I and III are both from the Venetian Epigrams, a series of short verses satirical or lyric that Goethe wrote in Venice, in 1790, shortly after the Revolution began. The epigraph that prefaces Part I is a poetic statement of the ironic ambivalence characteristic of Goethe in many of his comments on the Revolution.

I compare the Land to the Anvil, the Hammer  
to the Ruler; and the Metal to the People  
that cringe between. Woe to the poor Metal,  
when quite arbitrary blows strike it at  
random, and the Cauldron never comes out  
completely right.

[My translation of Venetian Epigram #14]

One may interpret this gnomic wisdom in a positive way, or in a negative. Its positive theme is that in a time of turmoil something new is being shaped by powerful forces: a new society is hammered out in the conflict of wills between those who rule and those who want to rule. But the blows may be arbitrary, irregular, aimless. The new society

(the cauldron), if formed by ruthless, unskillful hammerings may emerge in some dubious shape, not perfect [fertig]. From the unconscious depths where rebellion begins comes a force that no one is able to guide or control. This is how Carlyle perceives the movement of the Revolution. It is a wild outburst of nature, enormously destructive, its blows falling capriciously in all directions. Yet while the old is being destroyed, something new is emerging. Revolution is a death-birth, as he had said when he wrote Sartor. But it is hard to find the brilliant image of the Phoenix in the midst of the destruction Carlyle records.

Part I is filled with a sense of onrushing movement. In Part II this movement grows chaotic. The royal family's attempt to flee Paris is frustrated. In various parts of France the people rebel, the aristocrats fight back, France is locked into a period of violent unrest. Here is the epigraph Carlyle placed before this section:

I see walls overthrown, I see walls erected.  
 Here are prisoners, there too, there are  
 prisoners. Is perhaps the whole world just  
 one immense prison? And is the mad man  
 who is free, who chooses to wear his fetters  
 as a wreath.

[My translation of Weissagungen des Bakis #13]

These verses are from a small book of prophetic sayings that Goethe wrote between 1798-1800. "Strange is the prophet's song, doubly strange is what happens," he wrote. Cassandra's prophecies were so strange that men believed her mad. Madness is predicted, madness is what transpires.

The world as a prison is a profound and disturbing metaphor. It applies to the Sansculottists who have put their faith in the false gospel of Rousseau (FR, II, 37-38). It applies to the royalists and the emigres who cannot yet believe that their moment is past: that they will never return to their privileged life. All these people continue to erect walls to feel safe. Is throwing down walls in itself an act of madness? Does humanity fear freedom? These are some of the questions Goethe's verses raise. Carlyle did not set himself to answer them. For him, they are not problematic statements in a debate but symbolic comments on the human condition in a time of revolution. They are interesting for a number of reasons, but in particular because they introduce the theme of madness.

The main theme of Part II is change. "The thing that lies isolated, inactive thou shalt nowhere discover; seek everywhere from the granite mountain . . . to the passing cloud-vapour, to the living man," (FR, II, 102). But the continual movement of change cannot be grasped by the mind of man. In Part II no prophetic eye sees into the future. Carlyle's theme is that man is unconscious of the forces of life; "the leaf that lies rotting in moist winds has still force; else how could it rot?" This aphorism of Goethe's from Wilhelm Meister Carlyle had already quoted in Sartor; now he applied it to the accelerating decay of French society. Revolution is not something abnormal or unnatural; it is a part of inevitable change distinguished

mainly by its "velocity." The French found themselves in the middle of a revolution before they were aware of it. Carlyle's metaphoric description of the unconscious element in the French experience of revolution is the sleep of Epimenides.

According to Diogenes Laertius, Epimenides was a prophet of ancient Crete who, after falling into a sleep that lasted 57 years, awoke to find himself in a changed world.<sup>7</sup> In Carlyle's imagining, the French experienced this kind of traumatic awakening in one year, between the happy days of July 1790 and the "Bedlam" of July 1791. "Epimenides" is the title of the central chapter of Part II.

"Epimenides" might be called a transcendental chapter, one of a kind that Carlyle inserts from time to time into his narrative. Such a chapter contains a symbolic comment on the nature of man's experience in general, or on the significance of a specific train of events. His theme in "Epimenides" is that all men are "enveloped, deep-sunk in that Mystery of TIME." They are "Sons of Time," fashioned and woven out of Time," but must proceed towards a conclusion that is hidden from them (FR, II, 104). In Sartor only the poet was a son of time. But to the prophetic eye of the historian, all men are sons of time. The revolutionary acts of the French people are a part of "a singular Somnambulism, of Conscious and Unconscious, of Voluntary and Involuntary" (FR, II, 105).

There is a negative and a positive aspect to this literary figure. From the negative point of view, if man's life is a long sleep from which he wakes at intervals with a terrified start, it is really a nightmare experience. Goethe employed the myth of Epimenides when he was invited to write a play to celebrate the restoration of the Prussian monarchy after the defeat of Napoleon. He too described the awakening of Epimenides as a kind of nightmare.

Tell me, spirits, what fearful dreams are you giving me? Yes, I am dreaming: some god has driven me into a dark wilderness. Here there is no sign of my former bright world, no art, no trace of civilization; it's the end of everything; the dreadful last days of this earth.<sup>8</sup>

Carlyle returned to this theme in the final chapters of Part II, when he compared the uneasiness of France just before the Terror breaks out to "a frightful Magnetic-sleep which must issue soon in one of two things: Death or Madness!" (FR, II, 269-70).

Carlyle, like Goethe, feels that men cannot experience violent change (sudden awakenings to a new reality) without being in danger of going mad. The climax of Part II describes a scene of universal madness when the king's Swiss Guard is massacred, their bodies stripped and left naked on the street, by a united "Patriot artillery."

Blue Nationals, ranked in the Garden,  
cannot help their muskets going off,  
against Foreign murderers. For there is  
a sympathy in muskets, in heaped masses  
of men; are not Mankind, in whole, like  
tuned strings, and a cunning infinite

concordance and unity; you smite one  
 string, all strings will begin sounding,  
 --soft sphere-melody, in deafening  
 screech of madness . . . The brain of  
 Paris . . . has gone mad; what you call,  
 taken fire.

(FR, II, 299)

The fiery creation of a new society is linked with insanity. With ugly irony, Carlyle writes of "mad Gallic effervescence." The final events of Part II are acts of "frantic Sansculottism," statues of former French kings are overthrown in the streets before the eyes of Louis and his family. The new constitution is cast aside, the railing that separates "the Loge of the Logographe" is wrenched away (that is, the detached observer in the journalists' gallery is no longer safe from the multitude), and soon those who overthrow statues will execute men.

There was a happy ending to Goethe's play Des Erwachenes Epimenides, for it was written to celebrate the triumphant return to the throne of a Prussian monarch. Epimenides is not primarily a dark figure in the Greek legend; he was famous for purging Athens of the cholera, and for founding new temples to the gods. In this part of the legend he represents a renewal of life, and of faith. But the positive side of the myth does not emerge in Carlyle's history. For him, Epimenides symbolized the anguish of awakening from one experience to the startling reality of a quite different one. In the old legend this was the experience of a prophet and a poet. In Carlyle's history, it is the experience of a whole people.

For his epigraph to Part III, Carlyle returned to Goethe's Venetian Epigrams.

I have always hated apostles of freedom.  
 Each one seeks power in the end for himself.  
 Do you want to free the masses? Dare to  
 serve the masses.  
 If you want to know how dangerous that is--  
 try it!

[Venetian Epigrams #50, my translation]

Carlyle did not hate the apostles of freedom in the French revolution. To him, Mirabeau, Danton were great leaders, the "wild" men that the times produced. He saw them as giant men who dared to do and be more than other men. But when he called his heroes "Titans," he knew that in the ancient tradition the revolt of the Titans against Uranus failed. His theme in Part III is, "The Revolution, then, is verily devouring its own children?" "All Anarchy . . . is not only destructive but self-destructive" (FR, III, 254). The emblematic figure of this process is Danton, who one year forms the Revolutionary Tribunal, the next stands before it and hears his death sentence. His career exemplifies the danger Goethe drew attention to. The man who seeks to serve the people may be destroyed by them.

The story of the Titans is a myth about disobedience: the rebellion of godlike men against their father. Carlyle's use of this myth shows his sense of the tragic greatness of the leaders of the revolution. Mirabeau's prominence at the beginning won him a Promethean aura in Carlyle's

imagination not attained by any other figure. Danton's more gradual emergence as a revolutionary hero made him less memorable. But in the final chapters, Danton stands out above all the other participants in the action as the "Titan of the Revolution" (FR, III, 256). Carlyle describes him as being (like Mirabeau) huge in stature, with an immense "black" head, and eyes that flash fire. His words pierce men with "their wild sincerity." He is the only man who could govern France, with the significant exception of another "olive-complexioned individual" the artillery officer who Carlyle does not name until his final pages.

The Titan myth endows these men of the revolution with godlike qualities. One other man is elevated in this way, the author of The Marriage of Figaro, Beaumarchais. Carlyle reports that this "demigod" was "shorn of his splendor" and forced to flee for his life in the 1790's (FR, III, 16-18). He pays tribute to Beaumarchais' comic attack on the "artificiality" of the aristocracy, but implies that it was ineffectual.

Ultimately, the Titan story is a myth of failure which implies that those who greatly rebel pay a cruel price. A scholar who has examined the appeal of the Titan myth to the Greeks has argued that it "neatly explained to the Greek puritan why he felt himself to be at once a god and a criminal."<sup>9</sup> It served a similar purpose for Carlyle. It was a powerfully expressive metaphor that conveyed the ambivalence of his attitude toward revolution: his intense

admiration of the daring (intellectual and physical) of the rebels, yet a deep feeling that such a challenge to authority was wicked, deserving punishment. Mirabeau and Danton died young. The popular Beaumarchais grew old and poor. And the greatest Titan of them all was sentenced to exile on a small island.

It is preeminently the Titan myth that gives The French Revolution its epic quality. It is a myth about men reaching for power and suffering terrible retribution. For Carlyle, it was extraordinarily suggestive. It touched on the potent themes of son against father, the "wild" man against artificial authority, and more remotely, of black-haired Ishmael cast out from the patriarchal hearth. There are echoes of other epic stories throughout the text, and in the titles of some chapters: "Sword of sharpness," "Like a thundercloud," "The gods are athirst." And the ultimate theme that the revolution devours its children recalls the story of Cronus, the Titan who swallowed his own children to prevent their rebelling against him.

For Carlyle, the revolution ended with the defeat of Sansculottism, the rejection of the Evangel of Jean Jacques Rousseau. His conclusion is grimly ironical. Sansculottism will be succeeded by other "isms." Order is restored by "a whiff of grapeshot" (FR, III, 314). His stark concluding image of "the three grilled herrings" on the Paris working man's plate, fish without bread, makes the satirical point that the French people are still hungry. Earlier, he had

stated that the mass of the people, "the Dumb Millions," had endured less in the Terror than in any of their previous history. Those who suffered were the few "speaking thousands," the ones who "shrieked and published" (FR, III, 312). The passage is an ugly hint of the later Carlyle, with his contempt for the writing fraternity of his time. It is one of the contradictions of his character that he wrote with intense excitement about acts of rebellion, but consciously admired the stoical endurance of suffering.

The final pages of this ironic history contain a number of antithetical images: silent birth (of a new society) and clamorous death, hungry silent workers and a new aristocracy that dances in "flesh-colored drawers," the decisive shot from a cannon that halts dissent, the wise head and the "generous heart" (FR, III, 315).

Two quite distinct voices are heard in Carlyle's concluding pages, the narrator's (he of the generous heart) and Cagliostro's. The generous heart speaks out against Mammon, anarchy, and the spouting orators who endlessly debate about the clauses in constitutions; it rejoices that the shams of the French monarchy have been destroyed, "the very cant of them is burned up." It might be called the moral voice which sums up what the revolution achieved, but also points out what it did not achieve, the creation of a new society in France. The other voice belongs to the notorious Cagliostro. Carlyle dons the prophetic mask and repeats word for word the wild vision of universal

destruction with which he concluded "Count Cagliostro."  
A fiery apocalypse is described consuming all the Gigs of Creation. Is this the vision of a seer? a madman? or a fanatic?

One hears from behind the mask of Cagliostro one of Carlyle's authentic voices, the voice that spoke his hatred of aristocratic privilege and middle class respectability, of the arrogant world whose symbol was "the gig." It was a dangerous message for a man who wanted to succeed as a writer. So the message was veiled in the frenzied language that articulated his rage, although it alienated (as he knew) many of his readers. By naming the mask Cagliostro, he shielded himself from the contempt, or distress, that this kind of language aroused. The mask concealed--perhaps even from himself--the wildness of his rage against the society whose approval he was most eager to win. When the generous heart spoke, it required no mask. That was the voice of the ideal Carlyle, a well-intentioned man who addresses his reader as a brother! And of course this voice has the last word. "Farewell."

It took courage for Carlyle to write about the revolution. His thesis was that it was "a genuine outburst of nature," something that had to happen. He was writing for a society that was determined that such an outburst should not happen to it. What is more, his thesis implied (as did Sartor) that civilization was "only a wrappage," and that a particular order or political system could become

obsolete, and be discarded just like an old suit of clothes! This undermined confidence in the accepted institutions and ideas of his time and place. He was reporting the triumph (though brief) of Sansculottism to a society with an entrenched class system. How did he dare?

An essential part of his thesis relies on Goethe's theory of the cyclical nature of history, the one he elaborated in his notes to the West-Ostlicher Divan.<sup>10</sup> It was here that he stated that mankind's history alternates between epochs of belief and epochs of unbelief, and that in times when there is no deeply felt faith men's efforts are "unfruitful." Carlyle had quoted from this passage at the close of his critique of Diderot to explain why he felt Diderot's work had been ineffectual. To him, the French society that was overthrown had been decadent, and unproductive. What the revolution had destroyed was not a reality but "cant." The facade of French society had collapsed under the pressure of a new belief, "the Gospel of Jean Jacques" (FR, II, 38). Goethe had given him a perspective from which to view the revolution.

One finds very little in Carlyle's history about the motives of individual French men. The acts of individuals are viewed as comprising a kind of multiple group assault on a social order that collapsed because it had lost belief in itself. The belief that impelled these assaults, according to Carlyle, derived from Jean Jacques Rousseau. The French believed in the early days of the revolution

that they could make a new contract among themselves which would create a different society.

Carlyle rejected Rousseau's thesis that a contract was the basis of society; nor did he believe that natural man, as opposed to civilized man, was basically good. To him, the primary human fact was hunger. "The lowest, least blessed fact one knows of on which necessity mortals have ever based themselves, seems to be the primitive one of Cannibalism: That I can devour Thee" (FR, I, 551).<sup>11</sup> Society's function was to maintain some kind of order over the brutal demands of hunger.

Goethe and Rousseau are significant presences in Carlyle's history. Goethe's verses are quoted, his idea of history referred to, and he briefly enters the "story" as a participant (FR, III, 61-63). Rousseau's words are never quoted directly, his idea of history (the social contract theory) is mentioned only to be rejected, but his name occurs almost like a refrain.

In The French Revolution, Rousseau is a man of letters whose work had a decisive impact on the lives of his countrymen. To Carlyle, it was the belief in Rousseau's theory of the social contract that inspired the French to overthrow the structure of their society (FR, II, 39).<sup>12</sup> Here was a writer whose ideas bore fruit in that they changed men's lives, like a new religion. Rousseau was "a new fifth Evangelist" (FR, III, 204), the symbolic thinker of his age. But his philosophy, being false, could

not sustain the Sansculottes. Rousseauism was defeated by "a whiff of grapeshot."

Rousseau states in Emile that "les idees generales et abstraites sont la source des plus grandes erreurs des hommes."<sup>13</sup> There is something Rousseauistic in Carlyle's tendency to polarize the life of intellect and the life of feeling, and his distrust, even contempt, of "systems," metaphysical or political. He wrote in his chapter "Contrat Social," "Theories of Government!: Such have been and will be; 'in ages of decadence. Meanwhile, what theory is so certain as this, That all theories, were they never so earnest, painfully elaborated are, and . . . must be incomplete, questionable, and even false?'" (FR, I, 54).

Carlyle exalts the life of feeling. It is Mirabeau's "fire" that makes him a great man. Strength of feeling is the power that moves men to ignore false systems, and to be true to themselves ("sincere"). The epithet "wild man" describes Titans like Mirabeau and Danton who overturn traditional forms. This is Carlyle's version of the noble savage, the man true to nature. Rousseau had assumed that the "savage" would be benevolent; Carlyle knew that he could be fierce, and act without conscience or restraint. Yet it was the Rousseauistic side of Carlyle that believed in "the generous heart." He strikes that chord once, as we have seen, in the final pages.

Goethe and Rousseau are counterparts in Carlyle's imagination. It was dangerous for him to admire Rousseau,

a man whose writings had inflamed an entire nation to attack their traditional rulers. Goethe, by contrast, was a figure wonderfully detached from the conflicts of his time. Although he actually took part in an invasion of France, he remained apart from the animosities and fears that drove his prince. Carlyle quotes from Goethe's history of the French campaign to show how his role was that of a "scientific observer" of war, a student of "cannon fever" (FR, III, 55). Goethe is shown living among, but remote from, the tensions that rule ordinary men. Carlyle compares the poet's participation in the war to Apollo's visit among the ox-herders; he is a divine being who is not recognized by mortal men. When he presents Goethe in this way, Carlyle robs the poet of his essential humanity. He has become an Olympic figure: the harmony he maintains between the intellect and the emotions seems an unattainable idea.

Thus in The French Revolution Goethe, the ideal man of letters, maintains a distance between himself and the chaotic concerns of ordinary men. The verses that Carlyle quotes as epigraphs to his three main sections constitute what is ultimately an ironic comment on the making of revolution. While the theme of Carlyle's text is "an outburst of nature," Goethe's epigraphs are satiric reflections on the futility of erecting barricades, on the self-centered motives of revolutionaries, and on the illusion

of freedom itself. "The mad man alone is free who wears his fetters as if they were a wreath."

The epigraph in a characteristically Victorian way pronounced words of wisdom from a special position. When Carlyle used Goethe's verses in this way it shows Goethe not as the poet but as the sage, a symbolic image of wisdom that overshadows poetry. Goethe's name lends a kind of dignity to the explosive theme of revolution.

Carlyle was nervous about the reception of this work. He told his brother it was "a book written by a wild man" . . . a book that was "itself a kind of French Revolution . . . born in blackness, whirlwind and sorrow."<sup>14</sup> It was something that came from his fiery depths, that he was launching with considerable apprehension into the indifferent sea of public taste.

One of the first to review it was Mill, who declared that Carlyle had written an epic poem; by making this statement, he demanded that Carlyle's history be taken as a serious work of art.<sup>15</sup> Carlyle was grateful for his "courageous" words; indeed they heralded the book's success. Thackeray's review in the Times was another triumph. By 1840, a writer in the eminent Edinburgh Review noted that "Few writers of the present time have risen more rapidly into popularity than Mr. Carlyle . . . he has forced himself, style and all, on public attention."<sup>16</sup>

Carlyle had at last achieved fame. First his history, then his collected essays were enthusiastically reviewed in the great periodicals. He was now a recognized man of letters. And thanks to the offices of good friends like Harriet Martineau he had become a successful lecturer. Instead of the tub of Diogenes, he had a public platform to speak from. But his new career did not satisfy him. His letters of the late 30's reveal not pleasure but dismay when he refers to the lectures. It has been argued that it was these public appearances that established his reputation.<sup>17</sup> What are we to make, however, of his failure to publish any of these lectures, with the one notable exception of "On Heroes"? Their subjects were highly congenial to him, and he found his audiences receptive.

The contents of the first series, given in the spring of 1837, can only be deduced from the published Prospectus, and from contemporary reviews. He gave six lectures on the history of German literature ranging from the Nibelungen Lied to Goethe, the Schlegels, and Jean Paul. The second series consisted of twelve lectures on epochs of world literature. These were published after his death from notes taken by Ansty in the spring of 1838. A third series of six were delivered in 1839 on world revolutions. The fourth and final series were published in 1843 under the title On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History.

To judge from his letters, these lectures were an

ordeal to which Carlyle submitted because he needed the money. He wrote Emerson, "My Lectures come on, this day two weeks: O Heaven! I cannot "speak"; I can only gasp and write and stutter, a spectacle to gods and fashionables,-- being forced to it by want of money."<sup>18</sup> Five weeks later when they were over, the experience was still painful, "my agitation beforehand was less this year, my remorse afterwards proportionately greater."<sup>19</sup> Seven months later he reports that he still had a horror of lecturing.

He was not addressing a hostile audience. They were select "two-guinea ticket purchasers" who leaned "to the liberal side" according to Leigh Hunt.<sup>20</sup> In 1838, during the long series of twelve lectures, the audience increased. Hunt's reports imply that they responded warmly to Carlyle's "extemporizing." They heard Carlyle declare that Prometheus was "a taciturn sort of personage who does not knowingly howl over any trouble." He recommended Goethe's Wilhelm Meister to those of "unsettled faith." These phrases from Hunt's report of the lectures in the Examiner give one some idea of how Carlyle's words spoke to the troubled man in search of a philosophy of life.

Carlyle gradually overcame his initial nervousness at speaking in public. The money he earned was a substantial contribution to his income. He seems to have met with nothing but encouragement from his public. So why did he speak of "remorse"? Why did he refuse after 1842 to exploit the new career that had opened before him?

It is possible that Carlyle discovered that when he was lecturing before the public he could not be "true to himself." A lecturer necessarily adopts a role; he becomes a kind of actor. Here is how Monckton Milnes saw Carlyle in 1838: "There he stands, simple as a child, and his happy thought dances on his lips, and in his eyes."<sup>21</sup> How is one to interpret "simple as a child" to describe the complex Carlyle? Perhaps there is a clue in Hunt's note that he "betrayed" some emotion as he spoke the concluding words of his twelfth lecture: he thanked his audience for their "kindness" to him, especially when he considered "what you are and what I am."<sup>22</sup> He called attention to the contrast between the "rough" Scot and his elegant, mostly Tory, listeners, revealing an emotion that is notoriously hard to handle, gratitude.

Carlyle aspired to be a stern prophet of the truth, a "wild" man who dared to predict violent change. He found himself playing quite other roles: an entertainer of the great, a lovable fellow who moved an audience to tears or to "vociferous applause."<sup>23</sup> The approval of the audience that faced him was upsetting: he discovered how much he wanted to be liked. When he lectured, he was not free to vary and change his persona: to shift from Editor to Teufelsdröck, from grim reporter to "generous heart," (to name only some of the personae that he had used). Thus he distrusted his popularity, and the excitement that came with being a literary lion. Edward Irving's career had

given him reason to dread the "madness of popularity."<sup>24</sup> He was afraid of losing his proud self-control, and prayed that he would maintain an "unfevered heart." As he moved into aristocratic circles, he wanted to preserve his "alien" role. What is the duty of a citizen, he asked Emerson, "To be as I have been hitherto a pacific Alien?"<sup>25</sup>

He brooded about these problems as he was planning Chartism. What "dialect" was he to use to express his concern with the condition of the English people?<sup>26</sup> His decision was not to write as he had in The French Revolution, but to put aside the language of expanded metaphor, and use a plain style. There are few metaphors in Chartism. The persona who speaks is "the remote observer." The chief literary device is the rhetorical question. Chartism was a "pamphlet," not a book. Its relatively impersonal prose lacks the vividly concrete images that are found in "Cagliostro" or in The French Revolution. Thus Carlyle's attack on economic and political laissez faire lacks the color and force of these works. He was not so restrained when he wrote out his lectures on Heroes. Perhaps because he knew that he had a sympathetic public for them.

Carlyle first touched on the concept of the hero in Sartor. There heroism was no part of his image of either the Editor, or of Teufelsdröckh, it was Goethe alone who was a hero who transcended the poet and the man of letters. In The French Revolution, heroes, strong original men like Mirabeau and Danton who emerged to articulate Sansculottism,

were anti-heroes destined to be defeated when their false "evangel" collapsed.

In the lectures on Heroes, Carlyle attempted a world view of the history of civilization. He explored in a new way Goethe's thesis that the major developments in man's culture were the fruits of great spiritual beliefs. He surveyed the growth of pagan mythology in Scandinavia, the rise of Islam, Renaissance literature, Protestantism, the Enlightenment, nationalism, tracing these cultural developments to certain "original" men, men who lived in history because they articulated the beliefs that underlay dramatic revolutions in culture. His heroes were speaking images of the energy behind cultural change. The human form which embodied this energy had a different name depending on the time and place in which the great man appeared. In primitive times he was a god or a prophet. During the religious upheavals of the seventeenth century, he was a priest, like Luther, or a "spiritual captain," like Knox. The form of greatness was conditioned by the historical moment. In this sense, Carlyle's heroes are sons of time.

The heroes of immediate concern to him were the poets, the men of letters, the soldier-kings. The great men of the Renaissance, according to Carlyle, were the poets Dante and Shakespeare. The heroes of the Enlightenment were men of letters. The heroes of the rising spirit of nationalism were "kings," Cromwell and Napoleon.

From the wealth of European literature, Carlyle singled

out two poets as heroic figures. He introduces them as if they were gods: "They dwell apart, in a kind of royal solitude; none equal, none second to them" (H, 85). He brings these gods to life by presenting the image of their faces. The face of Dante holds the meaning of The Divine Comedy: "a soft ethereal soul looking out so stern, implacable, grim-trenchant, as from the imprisonment of thick-ribbed ice." Dante, the first of poets, has "the face of one wholly in protest, and life-long unsundering battle against the world" (H, 86). It is the image of a suffering Prometheus.

Carlyle's response to Dante tells us more about his own image of the poet than it does about the Renaissance one. It is an image of feeling (tenderness, pain, resistance, scorn) imprisoned in coldness: a fierce protest against "the world." He describes a Byronic sensibility covered by stoic reserve, a "godlike disdain." It was one aspect of his view of himself. Dante's Commedia he compared to "a great supernatural world-cathedral" (H, 91). He saw Dante as a Gothic artist who was banished from his city, doomed to wander and to suffer. To Carlyle, emotional "intensity" was the keynote of Dante's genius. Dante's images of heaven and hell were powerful because "he believes in it, sees it; is the poet of it in virtue of that." Dante's poetic vision has power because he literally believes it. Carlyle's assumption that Dante's images were "true" led him to establish sincerity as the value of poetry.

Dante, however, represents only one side of Carlyle's vision of the poet, that of feeling; the other is calm intellect, symbolized for him by the smiling but elusive face of Shakespeare. "Dante, deep, fierce is the central fire of the world; Shakespeare wide, placid, far-seeing is the Sun, the upperlight of the world" (H, 101). He contrasts the poets in terms of the same images he had used when he compared Mirabeau and Goethe.

In Shakespeare's plays Carlyle found an artistic detachment from the subjective comparable to that he had admired in Wilhelm Meister. Shakespeare's art was great because it was "no twisted, poor convex-concave mirror reflecting all objects with its own convexities and concavities" (H, 104). Shakespeare himself is not revealed; (hence his art is not artifice but nature). Shakespeare the poet magically transcends the Stratford peasant.

Carlyle discovered in Shakespeare a harmony of qualities similar to what he had once found in Goethe. "What we call imagination, fancy, understanding and so forth are but different figures of the same Power of Insight all indissolubly connected with each other . . . Morality itself. What we call the moral quality of the man, what is this but another side of the vital Force whereby he is and works?" (H, 106). In Shakespeare, this union of qualities was of a superior order; his imagination, understanding and morality were above those of the ordinary human animal. "Does not the very fox know something of Nature? Exactly

so: it knows where the geese lodge." It follows that Shakespeare's vision of nature will be more comprehensive than . . . and his morality is different from that of ordinary utilitarian man, whose vision is dominated by his hungers. To perceive the vision of such a "hero" may call for a special courage.

To know a thing, what we can call knowing, a man must first love the thing, sympathise with it: that is be virtuously related to it. If he have not the justice to put down his own selfishness at every turn, the courage to stand by the dangerous-true at every turn, how shall he know?

(H, 107)

The knowledge perceived by the heroic imagination must be quite different from the knowledge available to "the selfish and the pusillanimous." This dramatic dichotomy of hero vs. fox, insight vs. cunning, expresses Carlyle's sense that what the poetic imagination sees may threaten society's "vulpine morality"; demands courage to come close to and understand "the dangerous-true."

To Carlyle, Shakespeare's "Power of insight" was a gift that came without design or "artifice." "It is what I call an unconscious intellect," that was open to "much that was not known at all, not speakable at all: like roots, like sap and forces working underground" (H, 108). Shakespeare was not aware of how much he knew--what dark underground truths of human experience were to be found in the characters and actions of his plays. Shakespeare's naive

genius enabled him to be joyfully tranquil in an art, which concealed his own struggles and sorrows (the Werther in him was not revealed). "How much in Shakespeare lies hid." How enviable this seemed to Carlyle! The roots and underground forces that Carlyle himself saw terrified him. He saw realities beneath the "sham" of civilized life; he had sensed the hungry street urchin behind Count Cagliostro. He knew that he needed courage to tell the truths he saw.

The lecture on the Hero as Poet did not, however, call for a special courage. Dante and Shakespeare were figures of greatness recognized and accepted by everyone.<sup>27</sup> Was it partly to flatter his audience that Carlyle called Shakespeare the national voice? To call Shakespeare a national poet gave them an image of England's greatness. Although he claimed that Shakespeare was a universal genius to be ranked with Aeschylus and Homer, on the other hand, he spoke of his "true English heart" etc. and quoted A. W. Schlegel's dictum<sup>28</sup> that the history plays constitute a kind of national epic (H, 109-110). Carlyle did not develop this theme, however, because it was not yet an important one to him. He himself did not aspire to be the voice of England. He believed that, given the choice, Indian empire or Shakespeare, neither he nor his listeners would surrender Shakespeare; part of his dark knowledge was that England's Indian empire would go "at any rate, some day" (H, 113).

The lecture that did demand courage was the one that came closest to his own situation, the hero as man of letters.

In this lecture (in its published form at least) he had more to say about men of letters in general than about his particular "heroes," a pattern that was not characteristic of earlier lectures. In the eighteenth century, the men who wrote for magazines, newspapers (the men who wrote pamphlets as well as books) assumed the role in society that poets and preachers had previously held. Carlyle termed them heroes, because their vocation was to guide the mass of men through the chaos of ordinary experience. He saw them as "a perpetual Priesthood" bringing light to the reading public (H, 157). It was a large claim. It implied that the writer of prose had inherited the sacred mission that had been traditionally the poet's (the vates), or the preacher's. To add weight to his words, he quoted the German philosopher Fichte as a "distinguished teacher" who had pointed out much earlier the significance of the man of letters to those who "live merely among the superficialities, practicalities and shows of the world, not dreaming that there is anything divine under them" (H, 156). But the most startling part of this lecture is Carlyle's assertion that the great men of letters of the eighteenth century were only half heroes, who were not able to perform their proper role in society: they wore themselves out struggling against the prevailing philosophy of skepticism (H, 171).

In this lecture he portrays the man of letters as an Ishmael, a lonely man who passes most of his existence in

a "squalid" garret. This symbolic image of the writer as the rejected son makes a dramatic statement against the civilization of the Enlightenment: it accuses the European powers of being unable to recognize their real heroes. The English could not perceive the hero in the "rough seamed face" of Samuel Johnson, the French drove Rousseau into exile. The life of a writer, the hero of our time, is an "ordeal" in which the heroic soul struggles desperately to survive (H, 167).

Carlyle's three symbolic heroes, Johnson, Rousseau and Burns, are chosen to illustrate this thesis. Johnson could be made into a lonely Ishmael, whereas it is difficult to see Pope, Addison, Swift or Burke as men isolated from their society, and punished by poverty. Goethe, the hero of Carlyle's earlier years, clearly does not belong in this context. Carlyle explains that he chose his three because "the conditions of their life far more resemble what those of ours still are in England, than what Goethe's in Germany were" (H, 158). He shows that when he is discussing Johnson's or Rousseau's situation he is discussing his own. Goethe cannot be a heroic man of letters because he is not a son of time: he transcended his time. Carlyle's half heroes are not like Goethe, "heroic bringers of the light," they are only "seekers." They are overwhelmed by the conditions of their time, whereas, it is implied, Goethe's Weimar provided an environment that was favorable to poetic genius. There was a recognized place for Goethe in his

society, a place was appointed for him by the head of the state. Goethe did not stand alone, but Johnson, Rousseau and Burns, as Carlyle sees it, were left to carve out places for themselves. There was no guild to define and give status to their work. Carlyle's gloomy portrayal of the writer's situation is a cry for recognition. Behind his words one senses his longing for an ordered world where a man's talent would be recognized, and his social role clearly defined. He was looking for an England of guilds. The freedom of the man of letters to define his role by his works, was a fearful freedom to Carlyle, that demanded too high a price.

The lecture on the man of letters, as we have it now, is one of the least satisfactory of the series. Carlyle's description of the heroes so close to him in time seems perversely incomplete. The source for his portrait of Johnson is Boswell's biography alone, not Johnson's works. From Boswell's account of Johnson's early life Carlyle extracts a picture of a giant in pain, a struggling Hercules (not a Prometheus) whose chief virtue is to endure. He tells again the story of Johnson's proud refusal, when he was a poor student at Oxford, to wear another man's shoes, although his own were in pieces. He makes this serve as a metaphor for the plight of the scholar in a wealthy society. It symbolized for him Johnson's integrity: his contempt for privilege, on the one hand, and on the other his loyalty to religion (his own shoes!) in a skeptical age. Above all it stood for defiance, rather than passive acceptance.

In representing Johnson in this way, Carlyle was holding up a model for himself. His obsession with Johnson the man is so intense that it almost excludes Johnson the writer: the author of Rasselas, the biographer of the English poets, the great critic. He refused to confront the larger Johnson, the mind that could imagine the story of Rasselas. His narrow view of Johnson as the scholarly drudge who slaved alone in a garret to produce the Dictionary suggests a neurotic obsession with the sheer laboriousness of literary work. It is a grim omen of the years ahead when he was to spend so many weary, pleasureless hours on his biography of Frederick the Great.

Yet in choosing Johnson, Rousseau and Burns as heroes Carlyle was being more original, more daring than he had been in earlier lectures. He spoke of Johnson to a generation he felt had "disowned" him (H, 182). Rousseau was a hero about whom he had very ambivalent feelings. He introduces him with a list of negatives: he is not strong, he is not deep, he lacks the talent for silence. This half-hearted approach reflects Carlyle's anxiety about bringing forward as a hero a man whom his readers may not readily accept. Rousseau was the man Johnson had pronounced to be a scoundrel, "the worst of men,"<sup>29</sup> and his "Evangel" had inspired the revolution of the Sansculottes.

Rousseau was indeed an "unregulated Ishmaelite" a man whose name could immediately bring to mind a score of scandalous anecdotes in an English reader's mind. He and

his writings were "unhealthy" (H, 187). In pronouncing Rousseau a hero, Carlyle went against his own inbred puritanism, and courageously acknowledged greatness in a man he deeply disapproved of.

Carlyle's hero was the Rousseau who had opposed against the skepticism of the philosophes the truth of his own feelings: he was the passionate, tender man in an age that celebrated wit and persiflage. In a highly mannered society, he was the man who saw the handsome animal (the noble savage) behind the gentleman; in women he had discovered the mother rather than the mistress. His eye had penetrated the highly polished veneer of his society to the creatures struggling beneath its surface. He had, in effect, Teufelsdröckh's vision of the world without clothes. This was the vision that made him, in Carlyle's carefully chosen words, "do the function of a Prophet to his Time," (H, 186) and make men aware that it was time to discard the outworn garments of past experience. The writer of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, of Le Contrat Social, the creator of Émile, was a hero to Carlyle, who had seen into "the inward sphere of things" (H, 155).

Carlyle had first read the Confessions in 1819, when he was twenty-four. He was still meditating on its significance fourteen years later when he wrote his essay on Diderot. In it he called Rousseau the "wandering Tiresias of the time" (E, III, 207). It is a wonderfully enigmatic description: Tiresias was a blind man, but one who perceived

truths hidden from other men. It was Tiresias who knew that Oedipus was the source of the Theban plague, the man who unknowingly was the cause of the god's wrath. The Rousseau Carlyle admired was a truth-teller. He was a writer who had confided to the printed page facts about himself of the kind that most men hide. It was Rousseau who insisted on the value of sincerity. The philosophy of his saintly vicar of Savoyard was to accept all knowledge that he could not in the sincerity of his heart deny.<sup>30</sup>

Carlyle's heroes are above all sincere. This is the quality that is shared by such disparate figures as Mahomet, Dante, Shakespeare, the Hero as Breaker of Idols (Luther and Knox), Johnson, Rousseau, Burns. Napoleon, even, "had a sincerity" (H, 238).

The hero is distinguished by his ability to see the truth behind the mask of the ordinary and familiar, an inborn gift that Carlyle characterizes as "prophetic." Rousseau's frank description of his own singularity, his inability to characterize himself, as most men do, as a man of a certain class, nationality and profession was a sign of this gift. The life he described in his autobiography--his homelessness, his wanderings without a goal, his egotism, his sensuality, the "characteristic contradictions" of the man--seemed to Carlyle emblematic of his age.

Just as Cagliostro's life could be given the shape of a satiric poem, Rousseau's life had the shape of "an elegiaco-didactic Poem." It was a poem whose theme was

loss of an ideal world, whose hero is fated to leave the wholesome life of a humble craftsman for the uneasy public life of a man of letters. It is harder to explain what Carlyle meant by speaking of the "didactic" intention of the Confessions, but a book that attacked Voltaire and declared that everything was rooted in politics<sup>31</sup> was bound to be important to him. Rousseau's dislike of Voltaire echoed his own prejudice against the persifleur; it is possible that his speculations on how the political structure of the state affects the psychology of its citizens first made the young Carlyle aware of the need for social change so that he was quick to respond to the radical ideas of the Saint Simonians and very aware of the revolutionary significance of Napoleon's career.

Carlyle admired the writer but was troubled by the man. Caroline Fox, who was present at his lecture, records him as saying that the Confessions were the only writings of Rousseau that he read with interest, because in them you saw "the man such as he was . . . the Bluebeard chambers of the heart."<sup>32</sup>

It is clear that Carlyle was deeply interested in this autobiography that revealed the "wild" man behind the civilized mask, the ego that cunningly allowed a friend to bear the burden of his own guilt, the self with the insatiable appetite for praise and admiration. This sensibility obviously did not inspire reverence, it was disturbing. Something in Carlyle disapproved of this open acknowledgement of the

self's hunger and pain. He was a man brought up to admire the uncomplaining endurance of suffering, a traditional kind of virtue that was embraced in what he referred to as the "talent for silence." He felt that an examination of the self like Rousseau's was hazardous; it was dangerous to undertake to tell everything. Some years before he had written to a friend: "Poets such as Byron and Rousseau are like opium eaters; they raise their minds by brooding over and embellishing their sufferings from one degree of fervid exaltation and dreamy greatness to another . . . till they run amuck."<sup>33</sup> He compared the exploration of the inner self to indulgence in the opium habit, to a dangerous experiment in which one enters a dream-world that may bring the dreamer to madness.

Carlyle's description of Rousseau's face indicates this ambivalent attitude to him: a face "high but narrow," "deep strait-set eyes in which there is something bewildered looking," a "lynx-eagerness" with "something mean, plebian . . . redeemed only by intensity" (H, 185). It is an emblematic description in which Rousseau's eyes symbolize his visionary power, a responsiveness that has an almost animal sharpness about it. But where the gaze of a Shakespeare, a Johnson, or Mirabeau revealed inner serenity, Rousseau's reveals bewilderment and uncertainty. The threat of madness hovers over this "sadly contracted Hero."

The younger Carlyle had seen strength in Rousseau's courage to tell the truth, "toute la verite." Ten years

later he was become fearful of the dangers to the self in open and public confession. While he still admires Rousseau's power of insight, he makes him symbolize the weakness of the modern man of letters because of his longing for fame and applause. Rather revealingly, Carlyle ascribes this "mean" hunger to Rousseau's plebian background. It seems that Rousseau, unlike Shakespeare, was unable to transcend his peasant origins and leave behind him the small man's anxious struggles for recognition, for respect. To Carlyle, ten years after the Diderot essay, Rousseau's revelations of the self look like exaggerated gestures for attention that make him a figure of "theatrical" interest. The romantic exploration of the self turns the artist into a figure of pathos, a "dying gladiator" whose agonies serve mainly to entertain the unfeeling crowd (H, 186). Nothing is to be learned from this kind of suffering.

Rousseau's pain reminded Carlyle of his own. His treatment of Rousseau focuses on the psychological dangers of his literary method. Carlyle's extempory lectures were "a horror" to him because he stood undisguised before his audience. This public exposure placed him in a sinister "rose-light" of the kind he associated with the artificial world of the opera, or with the spectacles at Vauxhall. The hectic pink light of this kind of recognition (the kind accorded to Rousseau) was an ugly perversion of the serene white light of true fame in which Shakespeare, Goethe, "even Walter Scott" stood (H, 187). These great artists held up a

mirror to reality unmarred by the strange lights and shadows of subjective vision; theirs was a vision which concealed the vulnerable, emotional seer. It is not Rousseau as subversive social critic whom Carlyle rejects, it is Rousseau the exhibitionist.

It is surprising, at first, that Carlyle should place Robert Burns in the company of Johnson and Rousseau--a lyric poet with two writers of prose. Strictly speaking, Burns had not been a man of letters. He was a Scot whose poetry "like a little well in the rocky desert places" mattered a great deal to Carlyle (H, 188). He loved Burns.

Carlyle saw Burns as Scotland's Mirabeau, a man in whom the power of insight was lodged in a strong "thick-necked" body. When he considers Burns or Mirabeau, the puritan Carlyle makes no apology for the physical passions of his heroes. Rousseau, on the other hand, he called sensual, "unhealthy." He portrays Burns and Mirabeau as strong men who trusted their own intuitive responses to men and events. He believes that the man who trusts his instincts, who is at home in his body, is one who can govern other men. Such a man is at an opposite pole to the men who rule England, who only "grope, and hallucinate, and misse the nature of the thing" (H, 192). Burns is contrasted to the intellectual who measures, weighs, and hesitates before he makes a decision. The contrast illustrates Carlyle's lack of respect for the analytical mind, for the logical approach of a John Stuart Mill.

Carlyle was attracted to Burns and Mirabeau as two men who had successfully defied the restricted life they had been

born into; each had ignored the narrow definitions placed on him by place and time. Mirabeau, the hereditary landowner, became a leader of his people; Burns, the Scottish peasant, became the lion of literary Edinburgh. Each man had demonstrated the freedom of his imagination to see beyond the normal patterns of society. Mirabeau espoused the cause of the people. Burns' poetry declared in its joyousness and humor that neither poverty nor social class could define the value of a man. Carlyle quotes Burns's famous lines:

The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a' that.  
(H, 194)

There is a hidden thread uniting Mirabeau and Burns in Carlyle's imagination. Both men had died prematurely, Mirabeau through exhaustion and disease, Burns by something more sinister, as Carlyle saw it. He was destroyed by the attention paid to him: he sank under the stare of his admirers. The solitary man of letters pays a terrible price when he meets with success. Carlyle's anxiety about his own role seems to have made him unable to appreciate the comfortable fame and recognition that Samuel Johnson enjoyed in his later years. What haunted him instead was the poor figure Rousseau cut at the end of his life, and Burns' collapse into alcoholism, what Carlyle euphemistically refers to as "discontents, miseries, faults."

Carlyle concluded his discussion of the role of the man of letters with a disturbing image from one of Richter's stories. It is an image of Indian chieftains who use live

fireflies impaled on spits as torches to light their way through the dark. It was "a great honour to the Fire-flies," he wrote--with an irony that few of his audience heard. In his bitter view the original man's "fire" made at best a "pleasant radiance" in the life of the barbarous aristocracy he knew (H, 195). His striking image conveys more powerfully than the biography of his non-heroic men of letters Carlyle's sense of impotence even in the midst of the popular acclaim that he began to enjoy in the 1840's. His fear was that his poetic fire was being consumed for mere entertainment.

Carlyle's last lecture was an attempt to answer the question that was to dominate his imagination for the years to come--who is to govern? How was England to discover its "Ablest Man"? (H, 197). Although he had nothing but scorn for the ancient doctrine of the divine right of kings, Carlyle believed that certain men were born kings, born with the natural ability to rule over their fellows. He did not see such men in the society around him, but this did not deter him from holding out the hope that the right man would appear. In the recurring cycle of the history of mankind, periods of disorder and disbelief would ultimately merge into the past and become the soil from which new growth would emerge. The French revolution had been "a true Apocalypse" in which many things had come to an end. Where then were the new beginnings? This question haunts Heroes, Past and Present and his study of Cromwell.

Carlyle examined the documents of the Puritan revolution in an effort to learn more about an English experience of an apocalypse from which a hero had emerged. In spite of his Calvinistic heritage, his view of the English puritans was not uncritical. He saw that their function in history, like that of the Sansculottes, had been to destroy the obsolete forms of a decadent society. But they were iconoclasts who were unable, as a group, to create a new society. One man among them did achieve a certain order amid the social chaos. In his last lecture about heroes, he undertook his first examination of Cromwell as the symbolic leader of the English.

Carlyle tried the garment of the hero on Cromwell, and to some extent he made it fit. Cromwell had brought about order when the monarchy collapsed. Cromwell too, after some study, could be seen as an Ishmael, a lonely leader distinguished by his seriousness, and by his "wild rude Sincerity" (H, 216). Above all, Carlyle recognized his hero by his wounds--his hypochondriac "humor" and oversensitivity. He proudly contrasts him with those he called "the elegant Euphemisms," the aristocratic Falklands, Chillingworths, Clarendons (H, 217) and presents him as a man of the people whose "sympathy" with what was really happening made him great. Carlyle slights the men of intellectual quality (the historians, the preachers) in favor of the man with "the Faculty to do." Cromwell emerges from his imagination as a grim, unlovable Mirabeau given to black moods, but a man who takes control.

It is possible that Carlyle hoped to shock his audience with this portrait of the regicide. In the early nineteenth century, Cromwell was not a hero of the popular imagination. Carlyle is almost indifferent to the general of the New Model Army: he makes Cromwell into a kind of romantic poet, a Puritan Rousseau, who successfully overcomes "semi-madness." "He did harder things than writing of books" (H, 218). These "harder things" refer to Cromwell's dismissal of parliament, and to his bold assumption of personal rule in order to bring about an ideal theocracy. Cromwell's failure to form a durable government or a new moral society that could endure after him Carlyle puts down to the failure of the English people to understand what he wanted to achieve. The "vulpine intellect" of the great majority of men was unable to grasp a vision larger than their own; they could appreciate only the simple "knowingness" needed for practical survival.

The Cromwell Carlyle describes is neither a general nor a politician. He is not heroic because of his victories on the battle field but because he is a natural leader who has the capacity to see and to act: having seen the need for change, he acts to produce change. In order to carry out his will, he enforced a kind of silence: his dismissal of the English parliament was an aggressive action against the power of the word. This gives a new and ominous meaning to Carlyle's "talent for silence."

Carlyle's other heroes can be seen as ideal aspects of

himself. They have the gift of words; they are writers of books, they are preachers, translators, poets. But the hero as king is a hero he looks for outside himself--a strong man who can govern. In his portrait of the great Protestant leader, Carlyle denigrates the power of words. He apparently did not enjoy reading Cromwell's parliamentary speeches, finding them "ineloquent, incondite" (H, 219). One of his problems in studying the documents of the Civil War period was his inability to respond to the writings of its famous men, either Cromwell's, or any of the "noble Pym, and Hampden." Their words did not speak to him; but their actions did. So in his final lecture he celebrated "the great Empire of Silence" (H, 224), implying that Cromwell's lack of eloquence was not important.

It is clear that Carlyle did not believe that truth would necessarily emerge from the spontaneous and open debate of ideas between free men. He had little respect for the religious and political debates that were taking place around him. In his experience, the truth was born in darkness and silence, intuitively. Cromwell knew the time to act because "he had lived silent; a great unnamed sea of Thought round him all his days; and in his way of life little call to attempt naming or uttering that" (H, 218).

Carlyle's essays on Shakespeare and Cromwell are interesting in their attempt to define the role of the unconscious in a man of genius. They are somewhat contra-

dictory: Shakespeare's unconscious was not hindered by "naming" and "uttering," whereas, Carlyle implies, Cromwell required silence in order to be in touch with the roots of his thought. The Cromwell lecture polarizes speaking men and seeing men, the verbal man and the silent man of action. "Intellect is not speaking and logicising; it is seeing and ascertaining." A man's power of thought is seen best in what he does, not in what he says. Beneath Carlyle's contraries one finds the familiar romantic opposition of mind and heart, in which the mind is assigned the mechanical function of producing cold and lifeless arrangements of ideas, whereas the heart gives birth to something new.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1957), pp. 393-94.

<sup>2</sup>Conversations with Goethe, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Carlyle's image of Prometheus is the demi-god who brought the dangerous gift of fire to men. To Goethe, however, the myth of Prometheus was about the role of man's creative imagination. "The old mythological image of Prometheus occurred to me, who, separated from the gods, peopled a world from his own workshop . . . Prometheus has this advantage that, even in spite of superior beings, he is able to act and to create." Autobiography, II, 277-78.

<sup>4</sup>J. S. Mill, The Earlier Letters, 1812-1848, ed. Francis Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 333-34.

<sup>5</sup>The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, ed. Joseph S. Slater (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>Letters of Carlyle to J. S. Mill, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup>Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, 2 vols., trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958-59), I, 115-21.

<sup>8</sup>"Des Epimenides Erwachen: ein Festspiel," Werke, VI, p. 471.

<sup>9</sup>E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), p. 156.

<sup>10</sup>Werke, III, 504.

<sup>11</sup>Lee Sterrenburg, "Psychoanalysis and the Iconography of Revolution," Victorian Studies 19 (Dec. 1975), p. 253.

<sup>12</sup>It may have been Edmund Burke who drew Carlyle's attention to the significance of Rousseau's works for the members of the French assembly. "Him they study, him they meditate . . . Rousseau is their canon of Polycletus." His phrase "holy writ" reminds one of Carlyle's reiterated "gospel" of Rousseau. "A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly," Works of Edmund Burke (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1887), IV, 297.

<sup>13</sup>Jean Jacques Rousseau, Émile ou de l'Éducation (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 356.

<sup>14</sup>D. A. Wilson, Carlyle to the French Revolution (London: Kegan Paul, 1924), p. 399.

<sup>15</sup>J. S. Mill, in Thomas Carlyle, The Critical Heritage, ed. Jules Paul Seigel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 53.

<sup>16</sup>The Critical Heritage, pp. 76-77.

<sup>17</sup>Ethel M. Fulton, "A Study of the Public Lectures given by Thomas Carlyle," Diss. University of Toronto, 1969, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup>Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>20</sup>Leigh Hunt, The Examiner, 27 May, 1838, p. 324.

<sup>21</sup>R. Monckton Milnes, Life, Letters and Friendships, ed. T. Wemyss Reid (New York: Cassel, 1891), I, 220.

<sup>22</sup>The Examiner, 17 June, 1838, pp. 373-74.

<sup>23</sup>Carolyn Fox, Memoirs of Old Friends, ed. Horace N. Pym, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1884), p. 105.

<sup>24</sup>New Letters of Thomas Carlyle, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London: John Lane, 1904), I, 66.

<sup>25</sup>Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, p. 303.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>27</sup>Friedrich Schlegel, Lucinde and the Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 197.

<sup>28</sup>A. W. Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans. John Blade (London: Geo. Bell, 1876), p. 419.

<sup>29</sup>James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, rev. by L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1934), II, 11.

<sup>30</sup>Rousseau, Emile, pp. 349-50.

<sup>31</sup>Rousseau, The Confessions, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 377.

<sup>32</sup>Fox, Memoirs, p. 107.

<sup>33</sup>Thomas Carlyle, Letters to William Graham, ed. John Graham, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1950), p. 19.

## CHAPTER V

## The Face of the Past

When Carlyle moved to London, he entered a highly articulate society where he mingled with members of Parliament, journalists, poets and writers of all kinds. But in the aristocratic circles that opened to him in the late 1830's, there were few who were concerned as he was with the stirrings of the social volcano beneath them. And among all the clever talkers, the Bullers, the Barings, the Milnes, he could not see an English Mirabeau. In his frustration, he threw himself into a study of Cromwell, the grim, taciturn Puritan who had put himself at the head of an English revolution. He wanted to learn how a decadent society might be transformed into one where every man would understand what task was to be done, and have the means to do it.

But the book on Cromwell refused to take shape in his mind. Meanwhile, two quite separate events came together that made him put aside, temporarily, his seventeenth century studies, and work on a new book. One was his sudden confrontation while on a "pilgrimage to Cromwell-land"<sup>1</sup> with the men living in the workhouse at St. Ives. The other was his reading of the Camden society's reprint of the Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelonde. Past and Present

grew from a double image: the anguished faces of his contemporaries and the image of a remarkable governor of men in times past.

Past and Present was Carlyle's impulsive response to the despair he saw in the faces of the unemployed workers of St. Ives, a "moral, political, historical and a most questionable red-hot indignant thing," as he told Sterling.<sup>2</sup> It is his tract for the times, the book that expressed his anger at a society capable of treating "robust" human beings like useless objects. His indignation transformed him into a fiery Mirabeau.

His new book was the real sequel to The French Revolution. Together they stand as his poetic statement of the meaning of the human situation in his time. The first was a prophetic warning of what a revolution would be like, the second a criticism of society which mocked its symbolic forms of power (popes, parliament, kings) by placing them beside the forms of an almost forgotten past, an age scorned by his contemporaries for its monkish superstitions. It is an attack on the Victorian myth of progress.

Carlyle captured the attention of his readers, as he had in the past, with a strange procession of startling images: idle men sitting "in a kind of horrid enchantment," Ugolino (the helpless father in Dante's Inferno) in the Hunger-Tower, asses' ears on the head of the rich, which culminates with the image of the Sphinx, the terrible goddess who asks "Knowest thou the meaning of this day?" (P, 2-7).

These are Carlyle's metaphors for the grotesque contrasts of hunger and wealth he saw around him. His hope was that these images would strike "red-hot" on the feeble imaginations of his fellow Englishmen. The grief and shame he had seen in the eyes of the men trapped in what he calls "the Bastille" of the Workhouse became his "J'accuse." These faces were the true signs of the times, the serious symptom of a kind of national paralysis. What, Carlyle asked, is the meaning of a high civilization that has mysteriously doomed millions of its best men to a state of helplessness? Past and Present asks this question by presenting a fantastic phantasmagoria of images that functions like a medieval allegory: it hides and reveals the spiritual problems of the material world.

In Book II, Carlyle dramatically changes his tone. He adopts the persona of a medieval "Bozzy," and gives a lively anecdotal account of a thirteenth century English monastery and its remarkable governor Abbot Samson. He does not set out to give a strict, historical account of the monastery as a representative institution which supported x number of men on x number of acres. To him, this was the kind of work done by Giant Pedantry, or Professor Dryasdust. He wrote an entertaining narrative-biography in which the monastery becomes the emblem of a society troubled by debts, idle workers and beggars, and threatened with inner decay. The narrative focuses first on the monks' problem of choosing a governor, and then on their chosen governor's

skill in restoring order to the monastic microcosm. The climax is the scene when Abbot Samson gazes on the face of the martyred St. Edmond.

Past and Present is a didactic narrative in which Carlyle contrasts the face of present-day England with the face of the past. When he looked at the present, he saw despair and bewilderment. Looking into the past, he discovered in Jocelin's gossipy biography of Abbot Samson the outlines of a hero, the kind of hero England needed. Jocelin portrays Samson as a just ruler who succeeds in making the idle monks work productively, and rids his monastery of debt; his administration brings peace and plenty to the monastery's dependents. He is a builder who provides not only good housing for his people, but fine barns, churches and schools. And this wise ruler skillfully interprets men's dreams! When one of the monks has a dream of St. Edmond naked and abandoned, the brothers see it as symbolic of the deprivations they endure in their daily life. Samson, however, rejects their interpretation. He reads the dream as a rebuke to the brethren for their neglect of the poor. Samson is a governor who speaks straight to the moral conscience of his people.

Carlyle discovered a "talent for silence" in this remarkable man (P, 96). Although his people admire Samson's sermons (he spoke to them in their native dialect), it was his deeds that commanded their respect. This emblematic hero changes what needs changing, but is strong enough to accept what he cannot change. He does not rage uselessly

against those who frustrated him and cannot understand what he is trying to achieve. "This and that I have seen, this and that I have heard; yet patiently stood it" (P, 96-97). Carlyle admired this silent, stoic endurance of what cannot be changed.

Carlyle had found an ideal image of the hero as king, one that was more deeply satisfying to him than the hypochondriacal Cromwell, or "charlatan" Napoleon. Jocelin's Chronicle gave him this image. He also discovered in this ancient text an extraordinary, emblematic scene, the "culminating moment of Abbot Samson's life" (P, 119), the moment when he gazed on the face of St. Edmund himself.

Carlyle was one who looked closely at a man's face when he wanted to know the man within. To him, the face was a mask that both concealed and revealed the inner self. There are no faces in Sartor because the Editor and Teufelsdröck are simply verbal masks for aspects of his inner self that he wished to articulate. But the main characters in his other works have faces--Cagliostro, Mirabeau--Dante, Shakespeare, Johnson and Rousseau. The faces reveal the men. Samson wished to gaze on the face of his hero, the saint who had once been the well loved "Landlord Edmund," a man who had ruled wisely and protected those dependent on him. Samson looks on the face of the dead man in the hope of seeing the spirit beneath the flesh. This encounter of living man and dead saint exemplifies the living man's need to receive sustenance from the past. The scene struck

Carlyle (he translates it directly from the original) because it symbolized to him what he sought when he spoke of the worship of heroes. To know the man, one had to imagine his face.

Carlyle uses this scene to indict the dilettantish curiosity of his contemporaries about the English past. After describing how the monks reverently unwrap Edmund's body, he quotes a contemporary newspaper report describing how the patriot John Hampden's body had been hauled from its grave by pulleys, and mutilated by a souvenir collector armed with a pen knife (P, 119). The nineteenth century treats the past like broken rubbish. Wise men approach it with reverence.

For Carlyle, Abbot Samson and the monastery at Bury St. Edmonds were an "authentic image of a Time now wholly swallowed," a time that rebuked the present (P, 129). The Abbot's works were mouldering into dust, but the story of his life survived in Jocelin's Chronicle: the man lived on in the printed word.

He concludes Book II with a meditation on the energy that lies in beginnings, whether it be the beginnings of formulas, of language, or of forms of worship. All languages and religions once expressed the impulse of a man which he shaped into a word, or an institution, or a great church. Language itself had once been a new work. "The hands of forgotten brave men have made it a world for us" (P, 132).

Carlyle's imaginative encounter with the past restored his sense of life's possibilities--there was still work to be done, new formulas to be sought, new words to be spoken. His early faith in the "seed-field of time" revived. His present became authentic once he knew that he was firmly planted in the past. His final chapter on beginnings has a dramatic force comparable in its way to the scene in Wilhelm Meister when Goethe's hero at last meets with the sages, the men who, unbeknownst to him, have watched over, and sometimes guided his actions. It is a turning point in Wilhelm's view of himself. "He no longer looked upon the world with the eyes of a bird of passage: an edifice he did not now consider as a grove that is hastily put together and that withers ere one leaves it" (WM, II, 452).

Carlyle's meditation on the continuity of man's works moves him to reject the conscious pursuit of fame. His sense of what has been achieved by men long ago tranquillizes the uneasy yearnings of the self for recognition and glory. The voice of fame is merely the noisy utterance of a "goose-goddess" which the wise man can ignore. Knowledge of the past can make one strong: the forgotten work that lies silent beneath his feet "attends me and supports and keeps me alive" (P, 133). There is strength in its silence.

The verses Carlyle quotes at the end of Book II are from Goethe's poem "Symbolum" whose theme is the continuity of human endeavor. They affirm Goethe's belief that the

individual is not isolated in the universe, but moves with other men towards some high destiny.

Heard are the Voices,  
 Heard are the Sages,  
 The Worlds and the Ages:  
 "Choose well; your choice is  
 Brief and yet endless . . .

Here eyes do regard you,  
 In Eternity's stillness;  
 Here is all fulness,  
 Ye brave, to reward you;  
 Work, and despair not."

(P, 135)

The wisdom of the past speaks to him who will listen.

Carlyle responded to these words with an almost religious exultation. It was a message of hope to one who felt overwhelmed by the "phantasms" of the so-called real world. It told him that his work was valuable. Book II is central to the meaning of Past and Present.

Carlyle, like Abbot Samson, has had a vision of the past, and is emboldened to speak out strongly to the present. In Book III he launches a new attack on the illusions of nineteenth century England, especially the illusions of its complacent aristocracy. The most effective criticism is his satire on the two great institutions of England's past, the monarchy and the church, and on the new "ism," democracy, that seemed about to replace them. With wonderful energy and humor he presents two contemporary scenes: the Pope carted through the streets of Rome blessing people while he leans on "a stuffed rump" of a figure in a

kneeling position (P, 138), and the Champion of England "cased in iron or tin" who rides into Westminster Hall at a coronation and utters a challenge right out of Arthurian romance (P, 140). The third brilliant satiric image is the great Hat, seven feet high, the advertising gimmick of a London manufacturer which had circulated through the streets of central London. The stuffed rump and the tin champion, like two superb cartoons, make a mockery of the claims of church and monarchy to be living institutions that deserve the reverence of modern men. The great hat is a clever visual image of democracy's extravagant hope (as Carlyle sees it) to be as successful in holding society together as church and king were in the past. These images establish Carlyle's central thesis, that the powerful forms of the past are meaningless, but that democracy's claim to be the new "ism" is absurd.

His grotesque visual images are more telling than the verbal satire that relies on abstract phrases like Gospel of Mammonism, Gospel of Dilettantism, or terms like Morrison's Pill. Even the caricature politicians and priests that Carlyle invented are not memorable. They have Dickensian names, but they lack the solid, corporeal reality of the Dickensian type. Bobus of Houndsditch does not impress himself on our imagination, nor do Plugson of Undershot, or Jabesh Windbag. They do not spring to life, so that Carlyle's criticism of Chancery and of Parliament is blurred, instead of being sharp. We cannot see the

faces of these figures, and so we do not remember them. When Past and Present is concerned with contemporary history, it lacks the power of The French Revolution, for there are no memorable portraits of men, and it does not have the force of an ongoing narrative.

In Books III and IV, Carlyle writes in the first person, using either the editorial "we" or the more direct "I". It is true that Sauerteig and Teufelsdröck make an appearance, but there is no dramatic change of mood when Teufelsdröck speaks (P, 215), no sense of a new, more exciting voice when Sauerteig talks (P, 233), as there was in *Cagliostro*." When a change of tone does occur, it happens because Carlyle turns to Goethe. At the end of Book III, he quotes the whole of Goethe's "Symbolum" (or "Mason's Lodge") as the one answer he can make to his century's demand for a Morrison's Pill that will cure everything. This is his reply to those who look for a new religion, and it sets the mood for his "Horoscope."

When Carlyle calls "Symbolum" a marching song he means that in this poem he hears the kind of music that he can move forward to. As he wrote Past and Present, he achieved a new, vulnerable sense of his oneness with other men. His vision of the noble work of Samson and the mystical connection he felt with the workers of the past seemed to link him with those of the present. When Goethe spoke of the Bestreben [the effort] of "The Mason's ways," it was to Carlyle symbolic of the laboring-in-hope of all serious

men. One remembers that his father had been quite literally a mason, a worker in stone, who was to his son the very symbol of a man who faithfully persevered.

Goethe's poem is a dream vision of a company of men moving together through a silent universe, past changing shapes and forms towards a future that is concealed from them. As they move forward, they hear voices,

Doch rufen von drüben  
Die Stimmen der Geister,  
Die Stimmen der Meister:  
Versäumt nicht zu üben  
Die Kräfte des Guten. <sup>3</sup>

The poem suggests a mysterious universe without God in which men learn about the power of goodness, Die Krafte des Guten, by listening to the "masters." It is another version of the allegory underlying Wilhelm Meister, that man must go through a difficult apprenticeship before he becomes a master; he is not alone, however, if he will be guided by the experience of the wise men who have gone before him, the masters whom Carlyle terms "Sages." His translation brings out the terror and mystery of the journey through the world, and his version of the masters' message is more specific than Goethe's. Goethe's voices remind man of his inner strength (the power of goodness), whereas Carlyle's urge men to choose, because choice determines fate. Carlyle loved this poem. In it Goethe's voice once again assured him that he was one of those who would do something memorable.

"Eyes regard you." The words made him feel strong and hopeful. As long as he heard this voice his vision of duty was not grim and joyless. His favorite line, which occurs more than once in the letters he wrote to John Sterling, was "Wir heissen euch hoffen"--we bid you take hope.<sup>4</sup>

Past and Present was a book that had emerged "red-hot" from the depths of his imagination. When he wrote it, he did not feel as if he were turning into a Professor Dryasdust, as he did when he was immersed in the documents of the Cromwellian period. He felt like a poet, who could see in the rotted soil of the past the roots of a tree whose branches extended into the present. The mythological Life-Tree of Igdrasil is his metaphor for the unity he believed underlay past, present and future. It is the image in the mind of the Editor as he looks for "some glimmering of light" in old books and ancient wisdom (P, 38). It symbolizes the mystical link between the experience of men in the unhappy and confused nineteenth century and the experience of men in an age of religious certainty.

The Life-Tree Igdrasil provides a counterpoint to that other image in Past and Present--the ship of state tossed about by the "huge winds" of change (P. 200). The two are metaphors of contrary views: one a vision of human experience securely anchored in the depths of past history, the other a vision of human life subject to the powerful forces of nature which are indifferent to man. The Life-Tree expresses Carlyle's faith that it is possible to "read

something of the Eternal" (P, 250), that man can detect a spiritual meaning in the confused history of human kind. It is his symbol of hope.

Goethe's poem and the symbolism of the Life-Tree set the tone for the last part of Past and Present, where Carlyle sketches his vision of the future, and his hopes for a changed society. If in the past Gurth (the English working man) could only tend pigs, in the future he may build new cities and "conquer waste worlds" (P, 251). Parliament is to pass an Education Bill to educate Gurth for his new tasks, and "order all dingy Manufacturing Towns to cease from their soot and darkness, to let in the blessed sunlight" (P, 265). Captains of industry will organize the work to be done so that all men may be employed. The government should take steps to provide money and ships for the Englishmen who want to leave crowded England for a more spacious America. It is possible that Carlyle's belief in encouraging emigration (for others, not for himself) was influenced by Goethe's romantic treatment of the group of artisans uniting to emigrate in the final chapters of Wanderjahre. When he writes of the advantages to be gained from establishing colonies of Englishmen all over the world, he quotes two stanzas from the cheerful song Goethe's band of brother sing as they prepare to depart:

Keep not standing fixed and rooted,  
 Briskly venture, briskly roam;  
 Head and hand, where'er thou foot it,  
 And stout heart are still at home.

In what land the sun does visit  
 Brisk are we, whate'er betide;  
 To give space for wandering is it  
 That the world was made so wide.

(P, 268; WM, II, 345)

When he wrote Past and Present, Carlyle was confident that if an enlightened legislature passed certain much needed laws for the reform of English society, it could end the "Sooty Hell of mutiny and savagery" (P, 298). He believed that if men of wealth and rank would take the responsibility of planning and organizing the working conditions of the people, the result could be a radically changed society based on a "Chivalry of Labour." He eagerly offered this utopian vision to the thinking men of his time: a small group of landowners and industrialists, the body of professional men who comprised "the didactic," and those he called "the gifted." Nothing he had read or experienced led him to place any trust in the idea of the humble democratic man undertaking to improve the conditions which oppressed him. He expected little from the class he was born into except the, at best, "vulpine" wisdom of the average man to take care of his own immediate interests. From very early on, Carlyle's work and his reading had separated him from people of his own background. The ironic fact is that this radical son of Scottish peasants still looked to a lord to initiate significant change. To him, democratic man was a lumbering Caliban whose discontents posed a threat to the ordered world that intellect might

create.<sup>5</sup> Carlyle's dream was that a Prospero would be found among the thinking souls who would know how to control Caliban, and who would bring his island's inhabitants to a true sense of social relationships, one based on each group's obligations to the other: the rich would provide "permanent" work in decent conditions within clean, airy cities, the poor would thankfully accept work that gave them security and respect.

It was unrealistic of Carlyle to expect that the "idle" privileged classes in England would spontaneously shed the splendid feudal garments they had inherited to assume the uncertain, ill-defined role of working for a quite different kind of society. True, he no longer hoped for a future Mirabeau--the ideal figure that hovers over the closing pages of Past and Present is a "modern Duke of Weimar" (P, 284). In Carlyle's imagination, the small provincial court in which Goethe had spent so many years was an oasis in the midst of a Europe that was otherwise given over to reckless money-grubbing. He held up its ruler as an example for English lords to emulate. Unfortunately, he was mesmerized by a vague dream. He could picture a swarthy Mirabeau or a smooth-faced smiling Cagliostro, but he could not portray an ideal ruler for Englishmen, one who was emblematic of the practical intelligence required to create order out of chaos.

Carlyle judged Weimar by what he knew of its cultural life: he idealized this small German duchy because there

the poet Goethe was "Councillor" Goethe, the respected companion and advisor of the Duke himself. Weimar symbolized for him an ordered social world where men of letters were not mere parasites, "table-wits," but were something more than the indulged entertainers of a rich, decadent society. In this community they were supposedly protected from the "aberrations" that afflicted writers in England or France: they were not lionized one moment, and dropped the next, as Burns had been, or Rousseau. Under the wise guidance of a "Practical" ruler, who cared for the physical and intellectual well-being of his people, they could produce a serious literature. Weimar had welcomed not only Goethe, but also Wieland, Herder, and Schiller. Carlyle vainly dreamed that the partridge-shooting Englishmen he knew would choose to model themselves on Goethe's friend Karl Augustus.

Carlyle is preaching too much in the final chapters of Past and Present. In his anxiety to catch the attention of those Englishmen he felt had the power to reform his society, his voice grows shrill. Too often he relies for effect not on a few vivid and startling images to strike his readers' imagination, but on the insistent repetition of such epithets as "Maecenas Twiddledee," "Friend Prudence," "thickest quilted Grand-Turk," and "Quashee." None of these epithets have the imaginative power of "Son of Time" or "Titan." He addresses himself to faceless aristocrats and anonymous captains of industry and hopes to move the dilettantes in his audience with sarcastic references to

Dead Sea apes. What should be an important chapter, "The Gifted" (it asserts the ability of the man of letters not to submit passively to the "golden brutalities" of Corn-Law Lords or Cotton-Law Lords), is seriously marred by vague rhetorical questions couched in a quasi-Biblical language: "Dost thou know, O sumptuous Corn Lord, Cotton-Lord, . . . O much-enslaved World,--this man is not a slave with thee" (P, 290). On the pages of Past and Present the satiric words he had coined, Valetisms, Puseyisms, Doggeries, even the phrase "empire of Mammon," seem to lose their effectiveness with every repetition. What he is attacking grows nebulous.

Also, Carlyle did not realize how much the audience he was trying to influence was inoculated by education and an inbred sense of style against the verbosity and emotionalism of his preaching. His frequent sneers at dilettantes probably raised a smile more often than not from an assembly of fashionable men and women. His attack on dandies in Sartor was effective when it was focused on a particular, well-known dandy of the time. It is remembered, when his sweeping ironic statements at the expense of the do-gooders who attended Anti-Slavery meetings at Exeter Hall are forgotten. He ranted like a preacher, instead of looking for and developing vivid images and metaphors to convey his despair at the grotesque situation of the world around him in which a small number of highly educated, pampered, men and women lived in idleness only a few miles

away from ignorant, dirty human beings who labored for twelve hours a day. The few who were "gifted" understood his message, and admired him, but John Ruskin and Tyndall did not have the political power to make the decisions that needed making.<sup>6</sup>

Carlyle's preaching was a significant sign of the times, but Past and Present is memorable for Carlyle's dramatic antithesis of a past and a present day England that caught the imagination of his contemporaries. There was a stern beauty in Abbot Samson's struggles to restore the ideals of work and fellowship to a religious community that had almost lost its sense of purpose. Abbot Samson exemplified a man who rose above the inertia and moral indifference of his time and attained a true nobility of spirit. He built his life on the sacred obligation to care for his fellow man. To Carlyle, his story signified that spiritual greatness was not necessarily produced by the religious forms of the past, but came from within the man himself.

Recognizing the strength and beauty of the past was not a form of escape to Carlyle, when he wrote Past and Present. It meant a renewal of his belief in man's capacity to shape the world experienced through the senses into a meaningful form. On his visit to "Cromwell-land," he had been deeply moved by the cathedral at Ely.<sup>7</sup> This magnificent achievement of the past helped him believe in the possibility of beauty in the future. He loved Goethe's

"Symbolum" because it assured him that the past speaks to men; if they will listen to its "voice," it gives them the courage to endure uncertainty, and to survive change. It reminded him that men move through life in the company of other men. As long as he was able to hold on to this sense of being one in the community of men, Carlyle did not feel that he stood alone.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter V

<sup>1</sup>New Letters, I, 268.

<sup>2</sup>J. A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle, A History of his Life in London, 1834-1881 (London: Longmans Greene, 1885), I, 286. This book cited hereafter as Life in London.

<sup>3</sup>Goethe, Werke, I, 501.

<sup>4</sup>New Letters, I, 30 and I, 51.

<sup>5</sup>Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup>Ruskin's reading of Past and Present was a turning point in his life. John Tyndall read it three times, deeply impressed by a radicalism "high, reasonable and humane." John Clubbe, Carlyle and His Contemporaries (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press), p. 232. John Tyndall, New Fragments (New York: Appleton, 189-), p. 349.

<sup>7</sup>New Letters, I, 268-9.

## CHAPTER VI

## Carlyle the Biographer: "A Hunter after spiritual Notabilities"

In 1845, Carlyle published a second edition of his first book, The Life of Schiller, for the ostensible reason of securing the copyright. In the brief preface he wrote for the new edition, he refers with characteristic defensiveness to "this somewhat insignificant book," but behind his apology one may detect a lingering pride and affection for his first original work which might "innocently instruct those who are more ignorant than itself" (Sch, xiv).

Carlyle undoubtedly saw signs of his earlier innocence as he glanced again over this biography. His sympathetic account of the difficulties Schiller encountered before he became established as a teacher and poet came out of his own hopes and fears during the years when he was slowly and painfully working for recognition as a man of letters. The emotional tie between the biographer and his subject is revealed in his description of Schiller as "a man connected with us by a bond so kindly as that of teacher to the taught, the giver to the receiver of mental delight" (Sch, 3). The words reveal the pleasure the young Carlyle took in the role of disciple. The idealistic view he took of Schiller's struggles made him an especially attractive exemplar: through

all his early difficulties Schiller displayed the kind of moral strength that Carlyle prized. He had persevered on his chosen path in spite of threats of imprisonment from established authority; he had remained firmly committed to the truth as he saw it. His efforts were ultimately crowned with public recognition, an assured income, and the friendship of Goethe. These were the rewards that Carlyle dreamed of but that seemed hopelessly out of his reach while he was working on the biography. Yet three years later when he received Goethe's letter praising his work as a biographer and translator, he began to believe in his dreams: like Schiller, he would be a man of letters.

There was a moral purity in Schiller's commitment to his work that seemed to Carlyle almost saint-like. "Literature was his creed, the dictate of his conscience . . . and thus his calling made a hero of him" (Sch, 200). It has been argued that Schiller's influence on Carlyle's "conversion" was more important than most critics have allowed, more than Carlyle himself cared to admit.<sup>1</sup> The biography certainly testifies to Carlyle's admiration of Schiller as a spiritual hero and a poet of power. But his personal link with the living Goethe who spoke to him from the midst of the present proved to be the stronger voice. Part of the complex web that joined the two men in a special bond was their desire to pay tribute to the dead Schiller.

The Life of Schiller was Carlyle's first experiment in the art of biography, and one he continued to value. He could not think lightly of a book that had won Goethe's praise. Goethe was impressed by Carlyle's insight into Schiller's character, and attributed his unusual perceptiveness to the depth of feeling he brought to his task. "It is because the Scot can look with affection on a German and can honor and love him, that he acquires a sure eye for the German's finest qualities."<sup>2</sup> Underlying Goethe's words of praise are two assumptions that are important to the concept of biography that Carlyle was to develop. First, biography is designed to bring out its subject's "finest qualities": it is a work of appreciation. Second, for a true perception of one's subject's best qualities, one requires something more than intelligence and learning; to bridge the gap between two different minds, and to attain a true understanding of a subject's character there must be love and respect. The biographer approaches his task with reverence.

Carlyle's ideas about the art of biography emerged when he worked on an article on Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson for Fraser's Magazine. As he tried to define the source of the immense pleasure he found in rereading Boswell, he focused on the relation of the biographer to his subject. What stirred his imagination was the dramatic contrast between Boswell, the Scottish laird, and Johnson, the poor scholar. He marvelled at the fact that a young

coxcomb, an Edinburgh Tory, would journey to London to "drink muddy coffee" in the squalid surroundings of Johnson's home (E, III, 73). A biography had come from this unusual friendship that Carlyle boldly called a Heroic Poem: he saw in it the epic story of the battles of a Thinker (E, III, 75). To him, Boswell's biography was a work of art, an Odyssey in prose, as befitted the unpoetic eighteenth century.

How was it that Boswell who, morally speaking, belonged "to the lowest classes of mankind" could produce this work of art? It was because he was an "unconscious" artist gifted with the "force, diligence and vivacity" to produce a clear and vivid image of a great man. Boswell was impelled to write his book by a strong emotion, one that Carlyle sometimes called love, sometimes reverence. "None but a reverent man . . . could have found his way from Boswell's environment to Johnson's" (E, III, 77).

Carlyle discovered in Boswell the unconscious power of the artist to hold up a "clear mirror" to experience, a power he was later to ascribe to Shakespeare in the lectures on Heroes. He sensed an intellectual quality in his writing that he found to be far superior to the skills in logic and analysis of the philosophers (he was probably thinking of Locke and Hume); for Boswell's genius lay in the ability to create a complex image of reality that was at the same time an organic whole. Boswell's "reach," he noted, was of the kind that "showed itself in the whole not in parts." What he admired was not the brilliantly

observed detail that went into Boswell's description as much as the unifying conception that had produced a portrait so expressive of Johnson's forceful character. It was "a more free, perfect, sunlit and spirit-speaking likeness than for many centuries had been drawn by man of man" (E, III, 75).

This extravagant praise of Boswell's genius was written early in 1832<sup>3</sup> at a time in Carlyle's life when he was acutely aware of the connection between an artist's feelings and his ability to produce those poetic images and metaphors that startled the imagination into a new perception. Six months before this he had completed Sartor, the book that began in his mind with a sudden image of the world without clothes. This image had stirred up a storm of ideas, impressions, and memories. Boswell's portrait of Johnson was another such powerful image to him, for reasons he did not fully understand (nor can we). He describes the psychological impact of this book on him in words that convey an almost mystical experience of unexpected joy.

Which of us but remembers, as one of the sunny spots in his existence, the day when he opened these airy volumes, fascinating him by a true natural magic! It was as if the curtains of the past were drawn aside, and we looked mysteriously into a kindred country, where dwelt our Fathers; inexpressibly dear to us, but which had seemed forever hidden from our eyes.

(E, III, 77)

Carlyle expresses here an unusual feeling of intimacy with

his reader; he reaches out to him, inviting him to share in his delight in this "sunny spot," and this experience of recovering a lost moment in a "kindred country." The writer whose "airy volumes" produced this experience must be, he knew, a great artist.

Thus it happens that in his review of the Life of Johnson, the great man turned out to be Boswell, not Johnson. "That Boswell was a hunter after spiritual Notabilities, that he loved such . . . we account a very singular merit" (E, III, 70). To Carlyle, at this time, Johnson's work seemed to be fading into history, whereas Boswell's was wonderfully alive. Boswell might seem at a superficial first viewing to be a "Zany Prophet" (E, III, 74), but he was actually a wise artist.

Boswell wrote a good Book because he had a heart and an eye to discern Wisdom . . . because of his free insight, his lively talent, above all, of his Love and child-like Open-mindedness.

(E, III, 76)

When he wrote these words, the man who could write a great book was more interesting to Carlyle than the kind of man who changed history. The qualities he found in Boswell as biographer were the very ones he had discovered in himself when he was writing Sartor: a "childlike" free play of the mind and excitement at the possibility of new experience (openness), a quickness of response in the mind (fermentation); and underlying this sense of increased mental

energy, a feeling of enormous trustfulness, a confidence that there is a wise being who knows that there is a path ahead, not an abyss. For Carlyle this wise being was Goethe, for Boswell, Johnson.

## ii

Carlyle did not write another biography until more than twenty years had passed after writing "Biography." This does not mean that he stopped being interested in the genre. His most creative work after Sartor grew from his study of the memoirs and biographies of the individuals who had witnessed the events of the French Revolution. Although his essays on Cagliostro were concerned with a "life," they did not constitute a biography (a Heroic Poem) in his mind but a satire, a different kind of poem. A work celebrating a king of quacks was the polar opposite of true biography, a work motivated by love. His essay on Mirabeau was a trial run in preparation for The French Revolution with its epic theme, the rise and fall of Titans. Past and Present embraced a biography (Jocelin's account of Abbot Samson), but was a book with a larger theme than the biography of one man, and one with a complex counterpoint of anger and reverence, hope and despair.

The writing of Past and Present had interrupted Carlyle's research for a book on Cromwell. When he turned to this project again, it was without excitement, without

his having that feeling of fermentation that preceded a creative work. His imagination did not catch fire: there was not the flow of vivid images which he needed for a portrait of the leader of England's first experiment in social revolution. He wanted to make Cromwell an emblematic figure, a man whose character and life could be seen as symbolic of a change in the English consciousness, a change that had resulted in the rule of the Puritans. When he studied Mirabeau's life, he had seen him as a prophetic figure whose defiance of the conventional role of French nobleman had dramatically foreshadowed the collapse of the aristocracy in France. But it seems Carlyle was not able to see Cromwell as the kind of "fiery" man whom he imagined as the right man to lead a revolution. Nor could he see him as a dark-haired Ishmaelite, the mysterious prophet of a new age. It is as if the grim middle-aged general of the New Model Army refused to enter his dreams, in spite of his admiration for what he had achieved.

In 1845, Carlyle made an important decision. He decided to bring out an edition of Cromwell's letters and speeches instead of writing his biography. He could not write the life of a man whom he did not reverence. In making this decision, he retreated from the challenge of writing a creative work, and fell back into his earlier role of editor.

His introduction to Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches reveals, however, that he was not content to appear before his public as an editor of seventeenth-

century documents. He was not interested in historical documents as such: "The sound of them is not a voice, conveying knowledge or memorial of any earthly or heavenly thing" (C,I,3). He hastened to make clear that he was no conventional historian, no Dryasdust who had simply gathered together a lot of old rubbish from the past. Dryasdust, as far as Carlyle was concerned, was in love with death. He himself thought that written history was only valuable when it preserved the image of a man and ideas which continued to be meaningful in a later time. He points out that the Puritanism of the seventeenth century, admirable though it was, could not be revived in the nineteenth century (C,I,8). What is living in the records that Carlyle chooses to present is the voice of a man who dared to act against what he felt was false. He had demonstrated the heroism of Mirabeau by presenting an image of him as a gigantic man who "shakes his black chevalure or lion's mane; as if prophetic of great deeds" (FR, I, 137). His method for showing Cromwell's nature is different: to reveal the man through his words alone. In effect, he steps back from describing Cromwell as he imagines him in the midst of historical events, and seeks instead to present the "fact" of his existence by representing him in his own "rough dialect." Cromwell, like Teufelsdröckh, is not seen but is heard. Carlyle reaches for the effect of a man speaking to men--for a voice from the past.

Carlyle himself assumes two different voices in his

introduction to Oliver Cromwell, the thoughtful voice of a patient editor, then the more exciting voice of "our impatient friend." It is the "impatient friend" who attacks the dullness of English history and mocks the inarticulate English for only producing a Collins' Peerage instead of a Pantheon. He compares their failure to celebrate the great men of their past to the extraordinary achievements of primitive peoples, men who without the benefits of a printing press ingeniously keep green the memory of their heroes by means of "old songs, monumental stone-heaps and Quipo-thrums"<sup>4</sup> (C, I, 51).

Once again Carlyle was using the dramatic device he had discovered while writing Sartor to free himself from the confines of having to speak in only one "dialect." In the role of impatient friend, he could be a satirist, he could attack the unimaginative historians of the sort who thrust upon their bewildered readers the confused, dusty records of the past without giving them an intelligible shape, or indicating their order of importance, or providing the reader with an index (this last point provokes a special bitterness). When he satirized the dilettante historian, or the Dryasdust scholar, he held them up against the historian who is a nation's "sacred poet." The ideal form of national history was to be found in Homer's Iliad, an epic poem that was fashioned by "the genius, wants and instincts . . . of the one People, striving to keep themselves in mind of what was memorable" (C,I, 6). Carlyle

believed that it was the historian's duty to articulate the consciousness of his "People" by reminding them in memorable words (poetry) of past events in which they felt that they, or their representative hero, had performed some extraordinary action that they were not willing to forget.

Carlyle looked for a "Cromwelliad" but could not find one. His role as editor of Cromwell's letters and speeches was at best a minor achievement in his own eyes. As a writer who lived in an unheroic age, he was forced to make do with reproducing the "authentic utterances" of a symbolic Englishman: "Cromwell, the emblem of the dumb English is interesting to me by the very inadequacy of his speech" (C, I, 76). He argued that the words he elucidated were not great words. They were admirable only because they represented in some way he could not define the reality of a past greatness. Carlyle, like some blind sage, could only hear voices. He could not see clearly the ideal he wanted to convey.

The Cromwell book was a success, and a new edition soon followed. Carlyle had succeeded in making the past live for his own generation. The ironical fact is that his work on Cromwell has become "dryasdust" to later readers, and it remained for another generation to write a biography in which one could see Cromwell the man.

iii

The 1840's saw Carlyle well established as a writer.

New editions of Sartor, The French Revolution and Past and Present were published. His financial worries were at an end. But these were years of great restlessness, once the Cromwell book was completed. He recorded in his Journal that he was "lying fallow," and no longer believed in "Art."<sup>5</sup> Yet, early in 1848, he listed the titles of four books he wanted to work on: Exodus from Houndsditch, Ireland: Spiritual Sketches, Life of John Sterling and The Scavenger Age.<sup>6</sup> Of the four, the only one he wrote, as far as we know, was the biography of his friend Sterling.

Of the four books he projected in 1848, only one was a biography; the titles of the other three suggest subjects that called for satire. Houndsditch was one of Carlyle's metaphors for the Christian religion; "Spiritual Sketches" were probably satiric images of the Catholic Church in Ireland similar to his satire of the Pope in Past and Present; and the epithet "scavenger" is yet another expression of his contempt for his fellow intellectuals whom he had already satirized as peddlars of old clothes, or disturbers of the dust-heaps of the past.

Carlyle was in a mood to write satire in the late 1840's. He was bitterly disillusioned with the failure of his work, whether it was Past and Present or the Cromwell book, to change, or even to modify the laissez-faire stance of the English government. At the same time his contempt for conventional Christianity had grown, if anything, stronger. The title of the first book he wanted to write,

Exodus from Houndsditch, indicates that its subject would have been a dramatic rejection of the old religion he stigmatized by the epithets "semitic" or "Old clothes" (S, 3). It was his perverse humor to mock the origins of Christianity by drawing upon the latent anti-semitism in its history, and to make its traditional church rituals contemptible by comparing them to the old clothes hawked by Jewish peddlars in the Houndsditch market of London.

But Carlyle did not dare to write an Exodus from Houndsditch. Emerson was probably the only man, aside from John Sterling, he could talk frankly to about his feelings about Christianity; his letters to him in the 1840's reveal how he longed to denounce the "rubric mummeries" of conventional church-goers, and how bored he was with the "beggarly Twaddle" about Jesus that he heard about him.<sup>7</sup> He did not write about the "Exodus" from the Christian religion that he thought was necessary for Europe because he could not imagine how the people he knew could exist without their traditional beliefs. Indeed he thought with horror of the psychological consequences of abandoning religion. He was torn between his desire to strip away the old "false" ideas and his conviction that men needed religion, torn between contempt and pity. Even in his Journal he avoids using the words "atheist," but he was thinking of athiests when he wrote that "they that came out hitherto come in a state of brutal nakedness, scandalous mutilation . . . it is better even to return."<sup>8</sup> He spoke frankly to his intimates

about his indifference to the hero of the religion of his childhood, but to have written against Jesus would have been to expose himself as a non-believer, and infidel. He feared that he too would feel naked. The storm of abuse from the religious press that Archdeacon Hare's book on Sterling stirred up when it was published in 1848 indicated what might be expected.<sup>9</sup> He clearly did not want to make his stand against English society on that basis.

John Sterling's death in 1844 was a painful blow to Carlyle. They had become friends as soon as they met. He saw Sterling as he had seen Emerson years before as a "sky-messenger,"<sup>10</sup> a man whose instant sympathy with his way of seeing the world made him feel a new hope in the possibility of gaining understanding for himself, and the kind of acceptance that he longed for. Perhaps even then he saw Sterling as a younger version of himself.

Before his death, Sterling appointed Carlyle and Julius Hare as executors of his estate. It is interesting that Carlyle not only agreed to let Hare decide which works of Sterling to publish but entrusted him with the task of writing a biographical memoir to serve as a preface. The question arises why he was unwilling to accept the job himself, but it seems likely that he shrank from the pain of rereading Sterling's letters, letters brimming with affection for his friends, and full of eager discussions of books, poems and articles; and it would have been especially distressing to record his long struggle with the

disease that finally killed him. Carlyle obviously felt he could trust Hare, a devoted friend of Sterling's, and his early mentor, to produce a suitable memorial. What he did not anticipate was the uproar in the religious press that greeted Sterling's Essays and Tales when it appeared. The most virulent attacks came from the evangelical Record which denounced Sterling as "a most dangerous person," and declared that his "enthusiastic and speculative turn of mind was not only a snare to himself but to others, and especially of the weaker sex."<sup>11</sup> These attacks distressed Sterling's family and awakened Carlyle to the importance of writing a counterpart to Hare's memorial. When he sat down to write, it was to rescue his friend from the image he found in Hare's book of "a pale, sickly shadow in torn surplice . . . weltering bewildered amid heaps of . . . Hebrew Old-clothes" (S, 3). His anger at this distorted version of his friend's life roused him to action. He took up his pen to tell the true story of the man he had loved, "the brilliant, beautiful and cheerful John Sterling with his ever-flowing wealth of ideas, fancies, imaginations . . . which made the presence of him an illumination and inspiration wherever he went."

Carlyle had admired Boswell's biography of Samuel Johnson because he saw it as a heroic poem that celebrated the life of a spiritual hero. The subject of his biography of Schiller was also a spiritual hero, but Carlyle never claimed that this book was a heroic poem because he was

conscious of its lack of artistry--it was accurate reporting, but not an exciting work of the imagination. It lacked the wealth of detail that Boswell had been able to bring to his portrait because of his close relationship with his subject. Carlyle felt his writing in this early work did not have the imaginative power of an artist inspired by close knowledge and reverence for his subject. But when he came to Sterling's life, he could draw on his knowledge of a friend whom he had studied with great affection and concern for over ten years. He had loved Sterling, and his love heightened his anger at Hare's portrait of him as "a clergyman merely," and made him realize he could draw a true likeness of his brilliant friend. He could depict him as "an expressive emblem of his time and an instruction and possession to his contemporaries" (S, 6).

He wrote quickly and passionately. The words poured out of him as they had when Past and Present had come "red hot" from his imagination.<sup>12</sup> This biography, unlike the Life of Schiller, was to be a work of art. In this portrait of his "gifted friend" he brought together the hopes and the fears that the theme of the would-be poet continued to arouse in him. It was a labor of love colored with the excitement Carlyle felt in confounding the enemy, the fanatics of the religious popular press.

Sterling's life had not been outwardly a dramatic one; his few literary works were buried in the files of Blackwood's

and other periodicals until Hare's small two-volume edition appeared. But Carlyle was able to organize this slight material into an interesting shape when he perceived that Sterling's life had been "emblematic" of the dilemma confronting a gifted man of intellect in the 1830's and 40's. Where was such a man to place himself in a society he felt to be on the brink of some great change, some extraordinary revolution in thought and feeling? (Carlyle compares the "mad" uncertain times in England to the situation of Rome before it fell to the barbarians [S, 39]). Again, how was he to relate himself to traditional Christianity when contemporary scholarship was questioning the validity of the gospels? Sterling had discussed Strauss's Life of Jesus with Carlyle in 1839 (S, 188). His awareness of the radical changes facing his generation moved Sterling, like Carlyle before him to reject the three traditional professions that awaited the university man; he then discovered that there was only one form of public life possible for him, "the anarchic, nomadic, entirely aerial and unconditional one called Literature" (S, 43).

When Carlyle described Sterling's experiments as poet, essayist, dramatist and writer of fiction he was depicting a "nomadic" life similar to his own. The great difference was that Sterling was not an angry Ishmael but a "bright messenger," and his story was to end tragically before he had a chance to write an important book (S, 266).

The most attractive part of the Life is the account of Sterling's early days in London when he was busy founding a literary magazine (the Atheneum), visiting Coleridge, and taking part in the political life of the city. Carlyle's satirical portrait of the sage of Highgate is justly admired. He treated Sterling's enthusiasm for the poet as a youthful aberration to be dismissed with a rueful smile. Yet he admits that it influenced Sterling's early novel Arthur Coningsby which he read with considerable interest in 1833 before he had met Sterling. What he remembered of the novel nearly twenty years later was a strong impression of an "opulent" and "sunny" mind, adjectives that tell us he responded to the feeling and lively imagination of a book whose subject was otherwise bound to irritate him (its hero solved his problems by becoming a priest). It is significant that Sterling refused ever to discuss Arthur Coningsby with Carlyle. Undoubtedly he was unwilling to expose to Carlyle's heavy irony a novel that dealt with the experiences of his younger self, a victim of "Coleridgean legerdemain," as Carlyle sarcastically remarks (S, 94).

In this first part of the biography, Carlyle's portrait of Sterling as a "root-and-branch innovator" is a lively and effective refutation of Hare's image of the wavering cleric. Sterling's criticism of the established church is traced back to his debating days at Cambridge when his friends admired his witty attack on certain "black dragoons" who regulated people's lives in every parish church, and

were comfortably supported in their work by their parishioners' tithes. Carlyle shows him actively working for the passing of the Reform Bill, visiting Paris on the eve of the 1830 revolution, and raising money to help political refugees from Spain. He points out that Sterling was an activist. (Carlyle's own radicalism was confined to his writings, and to a few meetings with the Saint-Simonians.) But this political life was brought abruptly to a halt by the shocking conclusion to his intervention in Spanish politics. He helped to organize a military expedition to Spain which included his cousin Robert Boyd and other friends; Sterling himself planned to go along but was held back at the last moment by the pleadings of his young wife. The expedition was a disaster. Shortly after the group landed in Spain, they were seized by the authorities and summarily executed in a public square. Sterling's guilt for the part he had played in this grim venture was so terrible that his friends were warned never to discuss it with him. To Carlyle, this catastrophe was a "lightning-Stroke" that ended Sterling's "mutinous radicalism" in politics forever (S, 90). He conjures up by his symbolism the image of an angry Jove, swift to punish Sterling's involvement in an act of rebellion.

The Torrijos affair represents a turning point in this biography; it is when Sterling is first spoken of as "poor Sterling." A new tone is introduced into this affectionate memoir, one which undercuts the portrait of

the "brilliant" and "beautiful" John Sterling. The easy flow of the narrative is interrupted by a dramatic sense that the sinner has come for judgment. Yet the weight of Carlyle's disapproval falls not on Sterling's impulsiveness in supporting a revolutionary coup, but on what he calls the "crowning error" of his life. Driven by his remorse over the Torrijos disaster, Sterling entered holy orders. To Carlyle, this decision cast a shadow over his friend he was never able to shake. Although he was only active as a priest for eight months, he was to be labelled as the Reverend Mr. Sterling for the rest of his life. At the end of the first part of this biography, Carlyle portrays Sterling as a troubled man who mistakenly believed that dedicating his life to religious service would help him live with his guilt over the death of his friends. Ironically enough, Carlyle's image of Sterling here is not very different from Hare's: he shows a man who wavered from one belief to another.

Carlyle spends few words on Sterling's career in the church. In Part II, his theme is Sterling's determination to be a poet. Looking back on his friend's life, Carlyle sees the rightness in this decision, something he was unwilling to admit at the time. During the 1830's he refused to be encouraging when Sterling sent him copies of his poems. But in 1851 his verdict is different. "If called to define him, I should say Artist not Saint was the real bent of his being. He had endless admiration . . .

a deficiency of reverence in comparison (S, 124). The antithesis he implies here between poet and priest indicates how much his definition of a poet had changed. Goethe had been a poet-priest to him, a teacher of ultimate truths. His image of Sterling was not so lofty. Sterling was a poet on a more human level, a companion "radiant with arrowy vitalities" (S, 123).

When Carlyle tries to describe the impact of Sterling's mind on those who knew him, he turns to images of darting light. He compares the quick intellect so often revealed in their discussions and arguments to "sheet-lightening," light that startles by its sudden brilliance. But while he delighted in his friend's quickness, he was not satisfied by it, wishing that the "arrowy" insights could be expanded into a larger, deeper vision. He recalls urging Sterling to "concentrate himself into a bolt, and rive the mountain barriers for us" (S, 6).

Carlyle's hopes that Sterling's talent would be realized in some great prose work were doomed to disappointment. Sterling continued to write poems in spite of Carlyle's "stingy verdict." He published short tales in Blackwood's and a series of aphoristic sayings entitled Crystals in a Cavern. There is only one work of his that Carlyle singles out for praise, the longish tale called The Onyx Ring.

The Onyx Ring is an interesting story to examine when one is considering the relationship between Carlyle and

Sterling. It is a story of a man who succeeds in transforming himself into a number of different characters. Its hero (an impoverished writer) by means of a magic ring changes his identity seven times: he becomes in turn, a wealthy baronet, a farmer, a world traveller, a priest, a poet, a hermit-recluse, a humble fowler. Two of these roles are identified by Carlyle. In the poet Walsingham he recognized Sterling's idea of Goethe, in Collins the hermit, a version of himself. (It is possible that the ascetic priest Musgrave who is unable to enter into the joys and sorrows of his rural parishioners is Sterling's friend Julius Hare.)

The desire to experiment with different identities was a theme of considerable interest to Carlyle and Sterling. They were both writers who experienced much anguish before deciding on their appropriate role in society. They both rejected the role of priest, and both had aspired to be poets. Each of them had known, in rather different ways, (Carlyle in Scotland, Sterling in the West Indies) what it was to feel isolated from the mainstream of the civilized world, to feel like a recluse.

The tale's dramatic interest is focused on the clash that develops between Walsingham and Collins. Walsingham, the artist, is characterized by the intense romantic interest he inspires in women, and by his cold exploitation of their love for him in his poems. He is the courtly villain of Sterling's romance. The hermit Collins is an

independent-minded, kind-hearted man who is poor because he lent half his inheritance to a friend who has never repaid him. He despises poetry: "When a ship is sinking, what use is a fiddle?" he asks.<sup>12</sup> He is a man who trusts his feelings for the individual human being, but is suspicious of political man, and quite intolerant of humanitarians, whom he regards as currently fashionable types whose desire to help others is merely "voluptuous Self-indulgence" in feeling. He is a recognizable Carlyle, contemptuous of art and politics, but generous and understanding in his friendships.

Sterling was proud of this work. He sent it off to Emerson when it was published. Carlyle agreed it was one of his most successful pieces, "a curious Tale, with wild improbable basis but . . . a Tale still worth reading" (S, 152-53). "Wild" was never a pejorative term with him, he used it to describe the boldness of a work of his own imagination (Sartor), and when he applied it to men, it was to lonely Ishmaels, men who dared to be different from other men. His language of praise is restrained, but his enthusiasm for The Onyx Ring is clear: Sterling had written a promising work of fiction that was greatly superior to the usual popular novel. He makes only one specific criticism of it, which is to note how Sterling misinterpreted Goethe's character at this time, and made Walsingham a "hollow playactor or empty ornamental clockcase" of an artist (S, 152). He goes on to say however, that Sterling later came to value Goethe as much as Carlyle did.

Through most of this biography, Carlyle established a careful distance between himself and his subject. Only in a few vivid metaphors did his strong feeling for Sterling break through (in the repeated image of sheet-lightening, for example). In most of the book he maintained a thoughtful, meditative tone that kept his grief, and his pride, at bay. It is not until Part III that he speaks out and reveals the close bond between Sterling and himself.

This happens when he discusses Sterling the literary critic, and the author of the most interesting analysis of own work that had appeared. Sterling's article, which appeared in Mill's London and Westminster Review, was a vigorous and enthusiastic essay on Carlyle as a writer. With a shrewd insight into the contradictions in Carlyle's character, he described him as a thinker for whom knowledge was not the end of existence, and a poet who distrusted the "music of sweet song."<sup>13</sup> Sterling perceived the poet concealed behind the mask of the moralist, but he also noted Carlyle's almost self-destructive tendency "to sympathize with every struggle and turn away from the fruits of every victory." Undoubtedly, Sterling saw the wildness and the anger that Carlyle tended to conceal when he played the role of a simple, truth-telling Scot. He sensed the violent love of excitement that was sternly repressed in his life, but that flowered in his best writing. It is Sterling who seems most aware of Carlyle's frustrated search for a life of drama and color, and knew his need

to experience epic struggle: "He loves the resounding lyre which builds up the walls of cities, or the blast of trumpets which throws them down."<sup>14</sup>

When he came to this essay, Carlyle cast aside false modesty and admitted how deeply moved he was by Sterling's words. They were "the first generous human recognition, expressed with heroic emphasis and clear conviction . . . that one's poor battle in this world is not . . . mad and futile" (S, 191-92). Sterling was a disciple who could express his admiration eloquently. His verbal tribute, spoken in the public forum (Mill's magazine), was as important to Carlyle as Goethe's letters had been ten years before. Carlyle even saw something "heroic" in Sterling's praise, because the two friends had not agreed on a number of subjects. To Sterling, Carlyle's theory of the fruitfulness of silence was "incomprehensible"; they had disagreed in their interpretation of Goethe; they had argued over Carlyle's belief that "might is right." Knowing how often Sterling had argued against him made his words of praise all the more precious. He admired Sterling's integrity in putting aside natural egoism in order to give a just assessment of the "true" Carlyle. He felt that Sterling had achieved a genuine artistic detachment from his subject, the godlike objectivity of the true artist. In his "ready loyalty to truth" he was a "son of light" (S, 193).

The final pages of this affectionate and thoughtful biography raise a problem for the reader who finds an un-

resolved conflict in them between Sterling the "radiant son of the muses" and "poor Sterling." Carlyle's dreary iteration of "poor Sterling" and his "two poor volumes" grates dismally on our ears. The Victorian friend moans in his grief when a modern sensibility wants him to rage. Fortunately, the conventional atmosphere of the friend mourning beside the tomb does not altogether overwhelm the expression of Carlyle's pride and affection. Carlyle was proud that Sterling had not been a "mutinous rebel" who had struggled against a fate he could not change. He emphasizes that Sterling did not become a bitter man. His stoic, even cheerful demeanor in life is implicitly contrasted with the suicide of Werther, the self-pity of Byron, or Rousseau, and the angry defiance of the most famous rebel of them all, Milton's Satan. Sterling accepted his fate "like a true son" (S, 264).

The subtle thread that winds through the Life of Sterling and draws together the varying images of Sterling as wandering poet, clergyman, radical thinker, and friend is Carlyle's feeling for Sterling as a son. He begins by describing him as a son of the times whose intellect forced him to move away from orthodox belief and become a would-be poet in an unpoetic age. But Sterling's cheerful temperament, the openness to new experiences (demonstrated in his letters) and to new ideas, which made him such a delightful companion to his friends, made it impossible to see him as a martyr. "How could you have made an Indian Fakeer of

the Greek Apollo 'whose bright eye lends brightness, and never yet saw a shadow?'" (S, 265). Sterling was a "son of light" whose quick and sparkling imagination had lightened the gloomy atmosphere of self-pity that Carlyle tended to shroud himself in. And deeper, and more mysterious than his joy in Sterling's quick wit and sympathy, is Carlyle's sense of his Christlike acceptance of suffering and death--like a "true son" not a "mutinous rebel."

In writing about his friend Carlyle was in a curious way writing about himself. Yet he knew that Sterling had entered the "seedfield of time" with a confidence and openness to experience that he himself did not have. His friendship with Sterling had helped to keep alive his ever-ebbing belief in his own genius. If Goethe had been the father figure who had welcomed him into the company of poets and prophets, Sterling was the son who gave him a renewed sense of belonging in that company. Although Sterling had for a time resisted Carlyle's belief that Goethe was not an anachronism in the nineteenth century but a "Chronism,"<sup>15</sup> Carlyle believed he had eventually won him over to his view. And while Sterling lived, his friendship was a powerful antidote to Carlyle's feelings of isolation and despair. Sterling's obvious gift for living fully in the present moment had a special charm for Carlyle whose temperament and Calvinist heritage made him distrust happiness, so that he tended to feel overwhelmed by a sense of doom. Sterling for him was a symbol

of hope, as he recognized when he wrote in an affectionate letter early in their friendship, "Wir heissen sie hoffen."<sup>16</sup>

In the introduction to his biography, Carlyle told himself (and his readers) that he had undertaken to write about Sterling as a duty to his friend's memory in order to counteract the distorted image of the wavering cleric that Hare's pious memoir had inspired. But he discovered as he wrote that he was moved not by duty but by love. He was conscious that he was undertaking the biography of a man who could not be seen as "hero," for he did not stand at the beginning or at the apex of a great age. In writing about him he was obeying "the dictate of Nature herself" (S, 268). The "Nature" he meant here was not the desperate rage for survival that was his theme in The French Revolution. It was a deep, inner need to express his love for a lost friend who he now saw had been to him like a son.

iv

In 1852, Carlyle began to write the last and most ambitious of his biographies, The History of Friedrich II of Prussia called Frederick the Great. The question is what led him to this subject, one which took him deep into the eighteenth century, into a time he had so often described as a barren, unproductive age? At first glance it looks like a retreat into the past, into a pre-Revolutionary era in which a man's life could be examined within a

relatively stable social structure, a time not threatened (as Carlyle felt his own was) by imminent collapse.

Latterday Pamphlets (1850) shocked many of his admirers, and taught him that he could not hope to effect drastic change in either the thinking or the behavior of his contemporaries. Excerpts from his journals at this time show him in a mood of despair, obsessed with his isolation from those around him, his certainty that he had no one to talk to. He seemed to be almost overwhelmed with a sense of his own ineffectualness. "The review newspaper and world, all dead against me at present . . . The canaille of talkers in type are not my friends then. They know not well what to say about me."<sup>17</sup> He was angry at his "idle" unproductive state; except for the Life of Sterling, he had written nothing that expressed his deeper feelings. Only when he was writing did he feel alive.

Some time early in the 1850's his thoughts began to "ferment" as he read the correspondence between Frederick the Great and Voltaire. He saw them as two "Original Men" who were dramatic counterpoints to one another. The germ of Frederick is probably found in the words of Sauerteig quoted in volume III, "Voltaire was the spiritual complement of Friedrich . . . what little of lasting their poor Century produced lies mainly in these Two . . . what little it did, we must call Friedrich; what little it thought, Voltaire" (III, 177). It is not Carlyle the historian speaking here but Sauerteig, the voice of Carlyle's imagination.

Carlyle had once seen Goethe and Mirabeau as counterparts representing two contrasting modes of creativity; now he saw Voltaire and Frederick as two sons of time standing at the opposed poles of thought and action. It is significant of how much he had changed since he had written Sartor that he saw the life of action and the life of thought as psychological tendencies embodied in two different men. In Sartor, Carlyle could still accept the duality in himself. But by the 1850's, he was so disillusioned with the role of man of letters, so frustrated by his inability to see any signs of the impact of his ideas, that only a king seemed worth his attention. He experienced a kind of self-contempt for himself as a writer. The counterpart of Frederick is a man of letters whose work had always represented in his mind not the "arrowy insights" of a son of light but the soul-destroying image of the world without God.

The theme of his first volume is the history of the Hohenzollerns; he shows that Frederick's ancestors were not ideal mediaeval knights (like some of those his friend Tennyson wrote about) but rough barbarians who fought for the love of it. In preparation for this biography, Carlyle made a point of visiting the principal scenes of Frederick's life. The Prussia he describes is not a beautiful pastoral kingdom but a sandy waste populated only by a few small villages, its landscape "ill-tilled, scratched rather than ploughed" (IV, 240). Earlier in his career Carlyle

had annoyed his critics by his romantic enthusiasm for German literature. Now he was to disturb them by his admiration for the unromantic soldier-king of a small German state.

Frederick was not a hero to Carlyle in the sense that Odin, Mahomed and Shakespeare had been. These heroes inspired reverence; they were promethean figures whose fiery, creative energies had made their contemporaries perceive reality in a new way. Their words had made the world look different. Napoleon and Cromwell were heroes in a special sense: each had a vision of a new society, and had tried to bring that society into being by waging war with those who opposed his vision. Cromwell had had the courage to establish a government without a sacred king. Napoleon had caused men all over Europe to dream of a society in which the individual would advance through his ability alone, without reference to birth or class. Carlyle's Frederick does not belong in this company. Frederick did not write a great book; he did not challenge the social order he lived in. He was an emblem of a past way of life, the last true king of the old order.

In his biography of Frederick, Carlyle repudiates his early heroes, Schiller and Goethe, and his belief in literature as a power that can transform man's lives. In its first pages he announces how fortunate it is that Schiller did not, as he had planned, write an epic poem about Frederick, and declares that if Schiller had attempted such

a work, it would have been a "temporary" epic, "oversetting fact, disregarding reality and tumbling time and space" (I, 17). Schiller's imagination would have distorted the fact of Frederick: he would have described a dream-hero, not the actual man. Carlyle thus implies that his life of Frederick is anti-Schiller, and anti-romantic: his one aim is to fix his subject in place and time.

The mood that inspired this biography was neither reverence nor love. It was anger that drove Carlyle to this extended examination of the history of the little state of Prussia, anger at an England that seemed to him no longer the fit subject for a national epic poem. He mocks the ineffectual Hanoverian English kings who were no match in diplomatic intrigues with the wily Frederick. Disgusted by the wild popular enthusiasm in England for the Crimean war,<sup>18</sup> Carlyle (in the voice of Sauerteig) bluntly states that most wars are "extensive fits of human insanity," that are not worth remembering. The only wars that are worth discussing are the ones that bring about "significant change" (IV, 144-45). He studies Frederick's "Silesian campaigns," especially the third, better known as the Seven Years War, because they produced three remarkable results: they produced a nation (Prussia) from what had been an insignificant feudal state; they determined that America would be English, not French; and by defeating France, they prepared that powerful nation for the "Spontaneous-Combustion which occurs in 1789" (VII, 492-93).

Carlyle's stated purpose was to determine the facts about Frederick, to focus on what the man said and did. But his imagination created around the "facts" a web of meaning in which thoughts and feelings about his own life were woven into his concept of his hero's life. His Frederick is much more than a list of facts. It is a complex narrative whose theme is a dramatic conflict. On one level, Frederick is the struggling hero of a drama in which the enemy is his father, "the Rhadamanthine Spartan king who hates from his heart all empty Nonsense and Unveracity" (I, 434); his father's victory over him hardens him for the main task of his life, defending Prussia against the great powers of eighteenth century Europe, France, Russia and the Hapsburg Empire. Another theme of this "history," however, is the narrator's continuing struggle as the "Editor" to search out from the confused documents preserved by Dryasdust a true image of his subject. It has been shrewdly observed that "the drama of Frederick is the drama of a historian struggling to learn how to read his documents."<sup>19</sup>

Frederick is the antithesis of the man of letters. This is most effectively dramatized in the first two volumes which narrate how Frederick's father Friedrich Wilhelm forced him to become a soldier. The young Frederick had aspired to be a poet; he wrote and spoke French rather than his native German, studied the flute, dressed in rich brocades and wore his yellow hair in long flowing locks. Carlyle reports with considerable zest how Frederick's

father crushed this "dilettante" son's rebellion: he burst in on Frederick during a flute lesson and forcibly cut off his "bright locks." When Frederick made a desperate attempt to escape from Prussia, he was arrested, put in prison, and forced to witness the public execution of the friend who had helped him plan his flight.

Carlyle takes the father's side in this battle of wills. The son's love of poetry, of beautiful colors, of music are inappropriate to a future king; they have to be repressed. Frederick must learn to subordinate his instinctive self to the demands of his destined role as leader of his people. The business of a king is an extended version of a father's role, which is to wage war against the chaotic desires of unruly nature.

Carlyle portrays Friedrich Wilhelm as a man who believes that "human education is not, and cannot be, a thing of vocables. That it is a thing of earnest facts; of capabilities developed . . . of tendencies confined and tendencies repressed" (I, 434). His instinct is to act. When civilized man meets "wild" man in Carlyle, it is the wild man who prevails. Friedrich Wilhelm is a kind of natural man who fights his enemies, drains swamps, and builds cities; he does not sit in a study and write. Once, Robert Burns had been Carlyle's idea of instinctive man, a poet who articulated the deepest feelings of his people. But when he came to write his biography of Frederick, his "wild" man is a harsh, irascible soldier whose "Rhadamanthine"

judgment is that the civilized world represented by France is "empty Nonsense and Unveracity."

Carlyle himself did not really believe that Frederick's love of language and the pleasure he found in music were "empty nonsense." What he did believe was that the needs of the individual self had to give way to the needs of the larger human order. "Shutting down the subterranean," as he called it, was necessary if there was to be "a blue sky over Prussia" (I, 434). Peace and order could only be achieved by silent men who acted, and wasted no time in talking. His description of Frederick's "apprenticeship" to life is remarkably similar to the one he himself had in his father's house fifty years earlier:

We were all particularly taught that work (temporal or spiritual) was the only thing we had to do. . . . An inflexible element of authority surrounded us all. We felt from the first (a useful thing) that our own wish had often nothing to say in the matter.<sup>20</sup>

Carlyle's treatment of Frederick's friendship with Voltaire throws another light on his theme of the superiority of the man who acts to the man who thinks and writes books. He claims that he found the long correspondence between the two men "Shakespearian-comic" (VII, 188-89). Using the context of their letters, he makes Frederick into a comic character, a king who wistfully yearns to have his bad poetry praised. He makes mock of Voltaire's long love affair with Mme. du Chatelet ("Voltaire and his Emily"),

and laughs at him as a "poor Ishmael" who is beside himself with delight when he is the guest of a king: "such a life for a Supreme Man of Letters" (V, 217). To Carlyle, Voltaire is a "lynx-eyed animal" who is clever enough to win the friendship of an extremely intelligent king, but then foolishly embarrasses his royal patron by getting involved in a financial scandal, and by gossiping about Frederick's affairs in France. He shows how Voltaire obtained from Frederick the public recognition that a writer longs for, then ruined himself with him because he had no "talent for silence" (V, 375). In effect, he portrays Voltaire as a clever man who has no common sense when it comes to worldly affairs. The implication is that if such a brilliant man can be such a fool, more ordinary writers will be beneath contempt.

When Carlyle does praise Voltaire, it is as "a consummate Artist of Speech" (V, 312-13). But he portrays the distinguished writer as an ineffectual man whose life lacked dignity. He was hounded from one country to another by the caprices of those in power. His one means of defense was his pen. But Voltaire's pen no longer seemed to Carlyle the formidable instrument it once did; when he wrote Sartor, Voltaire's pen was a torch that burned away centuries of superstitious belief (SR, 194). But in the 1850's, it was not Voltaire's books but Frederick's victories that seemed to have prepared the way for the destruction of old Europe.

Uttered intellect is not what permanently makes way, but unuttered. Wit, logical brilliance, spiritual effulgency . . . how precious to idle mankind, and to the Newspapers . . . even when it is false; while Nature and Practical Fact care next to nothing for it.

(III, 9)

Carlyle makes of the friendship of Frederick and Voltaire a cynical emblem of the relationship that necessarily exists between a man of action and a man of letters: he compares them to a pair of lovers whose admiration for one another "sincere on both sides" survives only when they practice "mutual practical estrangement" (VIII, 188). The two belong in different worlds, and they can only remain friends if they stay apart, Frederick in the real, "practical" world, Voltaire in the "idle" world of opinion-makers. There is a dichotomy between them that even mutual admiration cannot overcome.

In Frederick, the narrative voice belongs to an Editor who (like the Editor in Sartor) is faced with the task of constructing a meaning from a confused mass of documents.<sup>21</sup> Carlyle's narrative is visually interrupted from time to time by sections of material printed in small type. The narrator's point of view is modified, or set at a distance, by the voices of other speakers, a "learned Doctor," a tourist (who introduces Carlyle's notes from his travels), Sauerteig, and Smelfungus. Sauerteig speaks only four times, all of them in the first four volumes. But Smelfungus speaks on at least twenty different occasions (as we

can see from Carlyle's index). "My poor friend Smelfungus," exclaims Carlyle in his last volume, "nobody knows how much of him I suppress" (VIII, 181).

Smelfungus is the spontaneous, irrepressible Carlyle who every now and then has to speak up and interrupt the laborious work of judicious selection and quotation that constitutes the work of the careful editor. He suddenly emerges to attack Prussian Dryasdusts, or to praise William Pitt as the only real king of England since Cromwell (VIII, 181). Smelfungus offers an ironic "contemporary" eulogy of Voltaire; he speculates on the "strange" fact that Frederick wrote some poems worth reading. Smelfungus is a voice from the underground which expresses thoughts and feelings that spring up in Carlyle's consciousness as he works and which do not belong, he feels, to his portrait of "the Last of the Kings" (VIII, 300).

It is Smelfungus who introduces the matter of Frederick's poetry, a subject that is not concerned with the external Frederick of fact, but with the "inner man." The mask of Smelfungus allows Carlyle to admit that he is moved by the poems that Frederick wrote in 1757, a time when he doubted his ability to turn back the combined forces of his enemies. Carlyle calls these poems "Confessions," "Night-Thoughts," "voices de Profundis," and the "Lamentation-Psalms of Friedrich" (VI, 241). In the pages that follow, we are abruptly removed from the world of the battlefield and transported to a world where the figures of interest are not

kings and generals but Rousseau, Edward Young, the prophet Jeremiah, and the David who composed the Psalms.

The poem that moved Carlyle most is the long "Épître à sa Soeur" in which Frederick contrasts Voltaire's peaceful role as a philosopher-poet with his own which is "threatened with shipwreck"; he concludes by resolving to think, live and die as a king. Carlyle responded to the despair expressed in Frederick's image of the storm-tossed mariner. The poem, he declared, "lyrically sings aloud . . . what one's indignant thought really is on the surrounding wars and atrocities" (VI, 243). The voice of Smelfungus reveals that Carlyle still responded to poetry, to words that expressed in a musical form the feelings of his inner life.

There are two artistic devices in Frederick that create a distance between the reader and the details of Frederick's life, one is the typographical device of printing certain materials (often, but not always, direct quotations from Carlyle's sources) in a smaller type than the main narrative, and the other the interjection of different voices. Sometimes the smaller type seems designed to warn the reader away from reading tedious details that might interrupt the flow of narrative, sometimes to protect him from material that might offend. For example, Carlyle felt he had to deal with the rumors that Frederick was a homosexual. He ascribes his main source for this "most melancholy business" to a manuscript known to have circulated

among Horace Walpole's friends which he ascribes to a "Demon Newswriter." His references to this manuscript, and the counter-arguments he produces against it, extend over several pages in small type. In extremely guarded language he notes that Frederick's relations with women flourished at a distance, and that there were no women at his court; he admits it is possible that Frederick was impotent. His cautious conclusion is that nothing can be proved. One has to admire Carlyle's courage in discussing at all the problem of Frederick's sexual preferences, although one's admiration is somewhat tempered by the comments of Diogenes that follow. Diogenes denounces the public's appetite for obscene details about the lives of famous men. He contemptuously compares people who hunger for scurrilous gossip to dogs who love to examine "the shameful parts of the constitution" of any dog they meet. The Editor cries "Enough, no, enough" and hastily brings the matter to an end (V, 345).

It is the voices that make the reader aware that the narrator has problems in dealing with his material. Diogenes, as we have seen, expresses his rage at having to deal with an unpleasant subject. Smelfungus expresses his frustrations with his German sources who, in the characteristic manner of Dryasdust, trample "human Heroisms into unintelligible mud and make Frederick's life a prosaic, barren subject" (VI, 304-05). Sauerteig complains of the difficulty of writing about Voltaire when the French themselves have no adequate account of him. "A proper History of Voltaire . . . what

he was, what element he lived in, what work he did; this is still a problem for the genius of France" (III, 178). How, Sauerteig complains, can one write about the battles of the past when most of them are so unimportant that they "cannot be fixed into human memories?" (IV, 145). Through Sauerteig, we understand Carlyle's anger at himself for having taken on the task of reporting on Frederick's three Silesian campaigns. Sauerteig still dreams of an "Ideal History," but the Editor must concern himself only with what "sticks to Frederick" (IV, 145). Carlyle's self-pity emerges when he speaks, in his own voice, of Frederick's "Promethean" situation in history, meaning that Frederick lives in human memory "without sympathy," in spite of what he suffered. He notes Frederick's stoic indifference to his lonely lot with gloomy satisfaction: "his indifference is decidedly admirable to me" (VII, 215).

In his final volume, Carlyle depicts Frederick as a son of time who was an unconscious instrument of "World-History." Despite his intelligence, he was blind to the coming revolution in France that, according to Carlyle, his victories prepared for. Frederick's counterpart Voltaire was also blind to what lay in the future. He hoped that men would turn against "l'infame," but never dreamed there would be a revolution against the secular authority. Although Frederick died only three years before the revolution broke out, he failed to read the signs of the time: "the Anarchy of Poland" and the American War of Independence (VIII, 3).

The significance of these "bits of Anarchies" was detected neither by the king nor by the man of letters. It was seen by "eyes of deeper speculation, World-Poet Goethe's" (VIII, 299). In the last pages of his biography, Carlyle pays this tribute to the poet.

Two grotesque images dominate the conclusion of Frederick, images that have an almost monstrous quality. The first is a grotesque image of birth: "Chaos is again big . . . and is still proving, in the most teeming way." With this strange metaphor Carlyle indicates that Frederick did not see the meaning of his life. He did not know that his final victory in the Seven Years War was part of an historical process that prepared France for the revolution.

The second image casts a dark shadow over Carlyle's last pages. He sees the nations of Europe, including England, "blinded, swallowed like Jonah, in . . . a whale's belly of things brutish, waste, abominable." He hints that his readers are incapable of perceiving the spiritual values represented by his soldier-king. Their understanding of the time they live in is darkened by their absorption in material pleasure.

The claustrophobic image of Jonah trapped in the whale's belly indicates how Carlyle perceived the situation of civilized man in the nineteenth century. To him, the cries for liberty and the "rights of man" that he heard around him meant some inevitable catastrophe: "Centuries sordidly tumultuous" would be marked by a destructiveness and violence that no one could see the end of. When he wrote the last

chapter of The French Revolution he was wildly excited by his apocalyptic vision of flames burning up in one brilliant bonfire all the "sham" institutions of old Europe. This vision had now become horrible to him. The failure of his dreams of the 1840's, and of the dreams of those in France, Germany and Italy who had also looked for a new society, gave him a new awareness of the "brutish" element in history. Images of dogs, wolves, and apes often recur in Frederick, as they did in the Latter Day Pamphlets. The only laughter there is in his long history is the ugly laughter at the "Houyhnm horseplay" that a Friedrich Wilhelm enjoys at the expense of a poor scholar at his court (II, 88).

The image of Jonah in the whale applies also to Carlyle's feelings about what had happened to his own life. He had not been able to give birth to the prophet-poet in himself. He was still trapped in the belly of his own time. His choice of an eighteenth century king for a subject indicates his despair. He turned into a Professor Dryasdust as he worked. The voices of Smelfungus and Sauerteig show him struggling to be something more than that, but they only speak briefly. He felt trapped. He had not achieved the power of the true prophet. When he writes admiringly of the barbarous Friedrich Wilhelm's pursuit of "justice," it is as if he bowed once more to the authority of his fierce old father who had taught his children to deny the wishes of the impulsive self. His deep respect for the stern image of his father set a pattern for him of deferring to authority

and learning to shut out the sound of the inner voices of laughter and desire. In the end, the voice of Teufelsdröckh, the humorous "little" sage, was overwhelmed by the puritan commandment to work at his task, however joyless it might be. He allowed his work on the life of Frederick to dominate his life for fourteen years.

In his old age, Carlyle grew to be like his father, a man who seldom spoke of his feelings, and deeply distrusted the play of the imagination. To be open to one's feelings, to explore them in a work of art was to be guilty of something shameful, of "unveiling yourself like Jean Jacques Rousseau" (IV, 237-38). This reference to Rousseau in the middle of his biography of Frederick is yet one more reminder of Carlyle's obsessive fear of exhibiting his inner self to the laughter of an indifferent world. Part of the fascination of Frederick for him was probably the king's success (the result of the severe lessons of his childhood) in hiding under the blue coat of a soldier the eccentric man of feeling.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter VI

<sup>1</sup>William Witte, "Carlyle's Conversion," Era of Goethe, Essays presented to James Boyd (Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 191.

<sup>2</sup>Froude, p. 327.

<sup>3</sup>Note Books, p. 252.

<sup>4</sup>Carlyle is comparing the English to the Scots and to the Indians of Peru. The Scots preserve their history in old ballads, while the Indians, according to Robertson's History of America (See OED) recorded theirs in the form of a "quipy," pieces of yarn knotted so as to convey a particular message. "Thrums" is a Scottish term for bits of yarn. "Quipo-thrums" is a Carlylean neologism.

<sup>5</sup>Life in London, I, 421.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 423.

<sup>7</sup>Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, p. 367; 371.

<sup>8</sup>Life in London, I, 423.

<sup>9</sup>A. K. Tuell, John Sterling, a Representative Victorian (New York, Macmillan, 1941), p. 364.

<sup>10</sup>Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, p. 172.

<sup>11</sup>Tuell, p. 364.

<sup>12</sup>John Sterling, The Onyx Ring (Boston, 1856), p. 159.

<sup>13</sup>John Sterling, Essays and Tales, 2 vols., ed. J. C. Hare (London, 1848), I, 264, 267.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., I, 267.

<sup>15</sup>Letters to J. S. Mill, John Sterling and Robert Browning, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup>New Letters, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup>Life in London, II, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., II, 151.

<sup>19</sup>Morse Peckham, "Frederick the Great," Carlyle: Past and Present, ed. K. J. Fielding and Roger L. Tarr (London: Vision Press, 1976), p. 214.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Carlyle, Reminiscences, ed. J. A. Froude (New York: Harper & Bros., 1881), p. 28.

<sup>21</sup>Peckham, p. 207.

"Heard are the Voices"

Whenever Carlyle's relationship with Goethe is discussed, most critics tend to agree with C. F. Harrold in denying that Goethe had any influence on Carlyle's "artistic purposes."<sup>1</sup> A. J. LaValley, while agreeing that Goethe was a major influence, declares that what he offered Carlyle was primarily "A cure for his skepticism . . . Carlyle praises Goethe only as a moralist and philosopher."<sup>2</sup> By focusing their attention on the relation between Wilhelm Meister and what Harrold calls "the Ethic of Sartor," critics have overlooked the significance of Carlyle's comments on Goethe's "emblematic intellect" (E, I, 244).

In the 1820's, Carlyle was interested in Goethe as an artist as well as a moralist, and this interest influenced the form of Sartor. One finds the evidence in the introductory note to his translation of Die Wanderjahre, and in the essay on Goethe he wrote in 1827. Carlyle declared that Die Wanderjahre was an allegory for the nineteenth century. "The scene is not laid on this firm Earth, but in a fair Utopia of Art and Science and free Activity: the figures, light and aeriform, come unlooked for and melt away like the pageants of Prospero in his enchanted Island" (E, I, 233). He had discovered a writer of fiction who wrote like a poet.

In the essay on Goethe, Carlyle distinguished two significant aspects of Goethe's genius, his ability "to transform into shape . . . the opinion, the feeling that may dwell in him" and what he called his freedom from "mannerism" ( E, I, 245 ). Goethe transformed the experiences of his inner self into expressive metaphor, an activity which Carlyle defined as "the grand problem of the Poet." He considered Goethe the equal of Homer and Shakespeare: each individual character in his fictions "lives freely within him . . . he[Goethe] seems not this man, or that man, but a man." Just as it was not possible to hear the voice of Shakespeare in the plays, one could not detect the man Goethe speaking in his fictions. He was a writer who rose above the subjective self, and conveyed the multiplicity of human experience. Carlyle aspired to do the same.

It was Wilhelm Meister that showed Carlyle it was possible to write an autobiographical fiction whose characters would be metaphors of aspects of his own nature rather than, as in conventional fiction, recognizable types from the "real world." It was probably Goethe's "Helena" (which he reviewed in 1828) that made him think of composing his own "Phantasmagoria" in which symbolic characters would change their form and meaning, and move freely about in space and time. In "Helena," Faust moves abruptly from a palace in Sparta to the courtyard of a northern castle: he is transported magically from the classical world to the "rich fantastic Middle Ages" (E, I, 180). In this phantasmagoria,

Faust's character is distinctly enigmatic, and he has "strange gifts of flying through the air." In Sartor, Teufelsdröckh's character is enigmatic in a similar way; he moves freely, and inexplicably, from the pastoral life of Entepfuhl to the Rue Saint Thomas de l'Enfer, and later from Weissnichtwo to London.

It was in Sartor that Carlyle developed his own "dialect," a language strikingly different both from the conventional prose he used in his critical essays, and from the relatively straight forward language of the works he entitled "pamphlets." "Chartism" and the Latter-Day Pamphlets were not intended to be read as works of art. They were not designed for the aesthetic mind, but for the political. They were, in effect, Carlyle's propaganda, works in a rhetoric that was intended to rouse men to act.

Sartor is an experiment in the use of poetic language. In it Carlyle became a poet, one who gave shape to his feelings and opinions by speaking in metaphor, in a language that both concealed and revealed. As a poet, he could freely assume different personae, and speak sometimes as Teufelsdröckh, the "winged sky-messenger," and sometimes as the "speculative" Editor who tentatively examines the philosophy of the Book of Clothes. The Editor speaks with the slightly astringent voice of authority confronting some new, unexpected phenomenon that it is not quite prepared to accept. Teufelsdröckh, on the other hand, has the voice of a dreamer, one who perceives reality as a series of

phantasms or poetic thoughts which appear and disappear without a logical or historical connection. It is in this sense that Sartor may be seen as a kind of Märchen.

The significance of Carlyle's interest in Marchen has been pointed out by G. B. Tennyson who quotes Carlyle's description of the genre in German Romance:

Such tales ought to be poetical, because they spring from the very fountains of natural feeling; they ought to be moral, not as exemplifying some current apophthegm, but as imaging forth in shadowy emblems the universal tendencies and destinies of man.<sup>3</sup>

In the metaphorical language of poetry Carlyle felt free to write about his own life. The stern prohibitions of his childhood ("I was forbid much") had made him feel that the spontaneous expression of his emotions was the kind of behavior permitted only to a mountebank, or a rope-dancer. Significantly, his new "dialect" was not like the language of his father "definite, clear, not in ambitious colours, but in full white sunlight,"<sup>4</sup> his new style was remarkably like Teufelsdröckh's, characterized by "a rich idiomatic diction, picturesque allusions, fiery poetic emphasis, or quaint tricky turn; all the graces and terrors of a wild Imagination, wedded to the clearest Intellect, alternate in beautiful vicissitude" (SR, 31). In this newly devised, ambitious form of speech he described his life in a series of "Dream-grottoes," and wrote of his changing self as a young Diogenes, as a Werther,

and a Son of Time. In Sartor he cleverly evaded the requirements of conventional fiction. He wrote about himself, but he maintained his mystery. Goethe had pointed the way.

The hero as Son of Time is the dominant metaphor in Sartor. With it Carlyle placed the self, himself, in history; his image conveyed the dilemma of the creative mind in an Era of Unbelief. This almost infinitely suggestive metaphor, which he had found in Goethe, enabled him to describe the situation of nineteenth century man caught up in the sweeping currents of the stream of change. The hero of Sartor is afraid he will be ruthlessly swallowed up by devouring time; Werther-like he thinks of solving his problems by committing suicide. He finds himself in a skeptical age when there seems to be nothing to believe in, and nothing worth working for. Or, noting that he lives in an age of revolution, he is fearful of being drawn into the social convulsions that threaten his society. The Son of Time turns out to be a superbly expressive metaphor for Carlyle's doubts and fears as he writes his concealed autobiography.

In Sartor, Carlyle describes symbolically how he moved from being a frustrated essayist (a man limited to discussing the ideas of other men) to becoming a creative writer. The example of Goethe's fiction-making overcame the prejudice against invented narrative that he had inherited from James Carlyle. Goethe was the "Spiritual Father" who told him that

he was a writer. He lost the distrust of symbolic representations of spiritual truth that was part of his sternly Protestant upbringing. With his epigraph to Sartor on the "seed-field of time" he expressed his joyful discovery that he was free to use his gift for language, free to transcribe the "Promethean Prophetic Characters" written in his heart (SR, 183).

Carlyle wrote Sartor inspired by the confidence that he was writing in a great tradition, the tradition of men like Luther and Goethe whose works heralded the coming of new ages. Although he was shaken by his failure to find an English publisher for his book, he continued to work and to write. But as he got deep into his next project, The French Revolution, he discovered something that threatened his high confidence. As he studied his documents, he learned how the revolution had happened, that it had been a violent "outburst of nature" in which it was impossible to see a shaping hand. If leaders there were, they were not poets but Titans, men who dared to take action against established forms, and then, like fiery Mirabeau, were doomed to suffer. Goethe had encouraged him to believe in the religious power of words. But when Mirabeau captured his imagination, his understanding of the myth of Prometheus changed. He came to see it as a myth about social action rather than imaginative vision.

It was an act of courage for Carlyle to write about

the revolution. Perhaps he became most truly a Son of Time when he undertook to describe the social cataclysm whose memory haunted his generation. His mentor Goethe took care, both in life and in art, to preserve a certain distance between himself and the violent events in France. Yet Goethe is a presence in The French Revolution. He appears in one of the final chapters; his words provide epigraphs to each of the three volumes. The verses Carlyle chose emphasize Goethe's ironic view of the major conflict of his time. They comment on the futility of struggle, on the personal ambition that motivates the advocates of change, and they imply that freedom itself may be an illusion. The image of Goethe in this book about revolution is of an Olympian figure who is deeply skeptical about the possibility of social change. Carlyle's quotations from Goethe (like the Greek epigraphs on the title page)<sup>5</sup> indicate his need to distance himself from the violence he describes. The epigraphs are his attempt to show that there is a civilized presence presiding over his narrative: the narrator reports the wildness of man, but he does not share it. Goethe's words provide a kind of frame to control the violence of thought and word.

The French Revolution contains dramatically contrasting images of the man of letters. The continuing motif of the "Gospel of Rousseau" points to the writer who inflamed a civilized nation to rise up against its decadent rulers. Rousseau plays the role of prophet in Carlyle's history, while Goethe appears as the poet. Goethe the poet moves in

an intellectual world above the rude concerns of ordinary men. Fearless and detached, he studies "cannon fever" in the midst of battle. It is Goethe's prophetic eye, however, that calls attention to the theme of madness that runs through Carlyle's narrative. He provides the larger vision to counteract the limited view of events of the narrator who, as a Son of Time, reports from within events he cannot wholly understand.

In The French Revolution we perceive how Carlyle has developed a distinction between men of letters and poets. The man of letters is involved in the life of his time. The poet seems to dwell serenely apart. In Heroes the poet and the man of letters represent different kinds of heroes; heroes who are determined by their place in history. The poet is the creator of symbols whose "shaped spoken Thought awakes the slumbering capability of all into Thought" (H, 29). The man of letters, however, struggles against the assumptions of his society, and only with the greatest difficulty succeeds in carving a place for himself within it. Carlyle's distorted presentation of men of letters in Heroes shows that he no longer believed in the possibility of being himself a Promethean poet who could bring the fire that would stir the imaginations of his contemporaries. His portraits of Rousseau and Johnson reflect his image of himself, a Half-Hero desperately struggling to overcome spiritual paralysis. Like them, he was a Son of Nature condemned to live in an age of Artifice

(H, 178). He was "an accident in society" (H, 159).

Carlyle's lectures were a turning point in his life. He confronted his public and discovered who they were: the dilettantes who he believed were soon destined to disappear from history! He suddenly saw himself as a mere performer, an entertainer speaking to a group of men and women who were unlikely to change anything in their society. Lecturing also forced him to present himself differently. It limited him in his choice of role. Only in the medium of the printed word could he move from being a Teufels-droeckh to a sober Editor, or from a wild Cagliostro to a "generous heart." His decision to edit Cromwell's speeches rather than to attempt a life of that "hero" signals his loss of faith in his imaginative powers. He saw himself becoming a popular sage, not the fierce prophet-poet of his dreams.

The lectures on Heroes ring with the word "sincere." They reveal Carlyle's obsessive concern with the problem of being true to himself. But was he being entirely sincere with his audience? He spoke to them scornfully about Voltaire "whose life was that of a kind of Antichrist" (H, 14), yet he himself was planning to write an Exodus from Houndsditch. It was when he came to present Rousseau as a hero that he really confronted the problem of the "dangerous-true."

Carlyle showed courage when he put Rousseau forward as a hero to his Victorian listeners, but he took care to

undercut his bold words with the portrait he drew of a "lynx-eyed" philosopher whose "semi-delirious speculations on the miseries of civilised life, the preferability of the savage to the civilised . . . helped well to produce a whole delirium in France" (H, 188). He implied that Rousseau was half mad to even question the values of his society, yet he himself in Sartor had attacked the "sham" forms of his society, even claiming that most Englishmen no longer believed in them. His highly ambivalent treatment of Rousseau reveals the anxiety he felt in associating himself with the "Evangelist" of revolution. While he longed to tear off the civilized masks he saw in front of him, he was afraid of the wild faces that might then be revealed. Philip Rosenberg claims to find a kind of optimism in the lectures on heroes, an optimism he bases on Carlyle's statement that "If Hero mean sincere man, why may not every one of us be a Hero?"<sup>6</sup> Rosenberg seems unaware of the difficulties Carlyle experienced with being sincere. The goal he aspired to was to bring about a whole society "of heroic mind" (P, 35), but what he could not face was the painful price that might have to be paid if one dared to speak out the "dangerous-true." He knew himself to be at best a half hero.

Carlyle's search for heroes in the distant past, and then in the near-past, was a part of that striving for "universality in understanding and affirmation" that he had admired in Goethe. But his temperament and his social

background did not permit him to preserve the distance between himself and his society that Goethe was able to achieve. The young Carlyle was drawn to Goethe as a writer who was "king of himself," one who could present himself and his society "with the knowledge of a chief actor and the calm impartial penetration of a spectator" (WM, I, 12). When Carlyle became a public figure, he lost the ability to perceive life as a spectator. Unlike Goethe, he never escaped from the confines of his own native land and discovered the reality of another culture. His journeys were inward journeys only, explorations of a northern landscape which was peopled with the phantasmagoric figures of German Künstmärchen, and later with "dark hostile Powers of Nature . . . Giants, huge shaggy beings of a demonic character." In the harsh world of Scandinavian mythology, it was Thor with his "all-rending Hammer" who struck his imagination, more than Balder "the beautiful, the just and benignant" (H, 18). He responded to the violence in this mythical world as fiercely as he responded to it when he read the documents of a revolution,

Carlyle was drawn to Rousseau because he felt himself to be, like him, a wild man among "Sartorial men," conventional thinkers who did not perceive "the naked Caliban, gigantic . . . who is stalking and groping . . . in search of new breeches." Unlike Prospero, Carlyle did not know the art of controlling Caliban. He came to believe that armed men would be needed to preserve a society when the dark forces were beginning to stir within it.

Carlyle feared the Caliban in himself, for he was a man full of anger. He both did, and did not, wish to write like "mad Rousseau." In naming him a "hero" he was attempting to come to terms with his deep-felt admiration for the author of the Confessions, which he publicly claimed was the only work of Rousseau's that mattered to him. He had a need to confess, but he was frightened by Rousseau's frankness, his revelations of a self that lied, postured, and shamelessly spoke its self-pity. He felt that there was a terrible penalty to be paid for confronting the dark impulses of the inner self. A malicious public mocked the contortions of "poor Jean Jacques," and forced him to flee into exile. The writer who had imagined the Yahoos went mad (E,I, 318).

Carlyle aspired to be a mythmaker for the Victorians. In Sartor, he introduced a new kind of writer, the intellectual as artist-revolutionary. But the public did not respond to Teufelsdröckh. When he portrayed the man of letters as a lonely Ishmaelite, he reflected his feeling that he was a "fallen" hero, whose vision of truth had been rejected by his contemporaries. From his published words on Rousseau it is impossible to determine what he found praiseworthy about his "lynx-eyed" hero. The rhetorical emphasis is not on a "heroic seeker" of truth (H, 158), but on a weak, vulnerable man. He had experienced a failure of nerve,

Carlyle's career as a would-be poet ended with Past and Present, the book which presented his image of a strong, wise man whose vision of an ideal order permits him to

dominate the world around him. Abbot Samson is Carlyle's last hero. After Past and Present there were no more great imaginings. His plan to write a biography of Cromwell came to nothing. The Life of Sterling was Carlyle's farewell to poetry; its hero is a "son of Light" who is defeated by time. In Frederick the Great his theme is the necessity, in a troubled Europe, to shut down "the subterranean" (Frederick, I, 434). His grim account of how Frederick's father, the "natural man," forced his son to become a warrior-chief symbolically enacts Carlyle's rejection of the self who loved literature.

Carlyle always distrusted his own eloquence. He was torn between his love of language and a deep suspicion of the man of wit, the persifleur, the man who used words to mock the feelings and to disguise the inner self. One can trace this back to his anger at the philosophers of the enlightenment who helped to persuade him there was no truth in his religion. Possibly, it went further back than that, to the instinctive distrust bred in the son of a Scottish farmer of the quick, clever "talk" of educated Englishmen. Was there also a dark feeling that the old, silent father was a better man than his clever son? However that may be, he came to feel that his eloquent language had turned him into a kind of performer. His words entertained the dilettantes but could not convert them to better ways. Thus his success as a "sage" only deepened his sense of alienation. He stopped writing about Teufelsdröckhs, Cagliostro, or fiery

Mirabeaus. He tried to repress his "wild" side and become the sober historian of facts.

Byron, and then Rousseau, symbolized the demonic imagination for Carlyle. Goethe was the counterpart to the romantic subjectivity that both attracted and repelled him. Was he aware that Goethe's attitude toward the demonic was much freer than his? As Geoffrey Hartmann has pointed out, for Goethe "The demonic is not ultimately distinguishable from the productive power of nature, and is called the demonic simply because adversity may accompany its energetic drive. So Goethe's admiration for Napoleon and Byron includes their ruin as well as their achievements."<sup>7</sup> When Carlyle read Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe in 1836, he realized that he had grown far away from the poet of Weimar. He enjoyed Eckermann's portrait, but noted "It does me good for the time . . . more . . . and yet it is not my environment now--will not yield me Obdach (shelter) here and now. Goethe is great, brown-visaged, authentic looking . . . yet rathselhaft (enigmatic)."<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, Carlyle despaired of being able to convey what Goethe meant to him. "Speak as I might, Goethe, to the great majority of you, would remain problematic, vague" (H, 158). His contemporaries, he implied, were incapable of grasping the breadth of Goethe's mind. Even to Carlyle himself, Goethe became rathselhaft, a writer deeply loved but not to be emulated. When he spoke of him it was to focus on the wisdom of a sage, not on the

imaginative powers of a great poet. At his inauguration as Rector of the University of Edinburgh, he spoke of the "meek wisdom" of Wilhelm Meister's Travels. It outlined Goethe's views of "the religious phenomena of the modern and the ancient world . . . in the most aerial, graceful, delicately wise kind of way, so as to keep himself out of the common controversies of the street and of the forum."<sup>9</sup> The image of Goethe he offered his audience was austere aesthetic, the image of an unworldly intellectual who lived in a realm safely apart from the "common controversies of the street and of the forum." The Goethe whose "wizard light of imagination" had excited Carlyle's to imagine a Teufelsdröckh, was now presented as the author of "a scheme of entirely mute education."<sup>10</sup>

It is significant that Carlyle did not act the fierce truth-telling prophet on this occasion. At his old university he put on the role of the kindly but plain-speaking Scot, the admirer of Knox and Cromwell. As the Illustrated London News reported, "It is worthy of note that Mr. Carlyle's address was quite free from the quaint phraseology which marks, and as many think, disfigures some of his writings."<sup>11</sup> He did not speak in the wild, passionate language of the books that had made him famous. The theme of his speech was the value of silence. "Silence withal is the eternal duty of a man. He won't get to any real understanding of what is complex, and what is more than ought else pertinent to his interests, without

keeping silence too."<sup>12</sup> He advised the listening students to distrust the man who was clever with words. "Why tell me that a man is a fine speaker, if it is not the truth that he is speaking?"

Carlyle was a harsh critic of himself and of his contemporaries. He felt that neither he nor his fellow writers had conveyed the truth of what men were feeling or thinking in the revolutionary age they lived in. He knew that the naked Caliban of social protest could not be appeased by words. This knowledge embittered him. It led him to reject the imaginative literature of his time because to him it did not report the harsh truths of his experience. The voice of his own time had betrayed him because to him the words it spoke denied the urgent "fact." His grim, anti-intellectual stance did not lead him to complete cynicism, however. The old words were still authentic. He might stubbornly continue to praise Knox and Cromwell, but it was not Knox or Cromwell that he quoted as he concluded his speech to the students in Edinburgh. "But heard are the Voices,/Heard are the Sages." He might talk of the value of "mute education," but he ended by quoting poetry, Goethe's "road-melody" that had always symbolized for him what poets should mean to their fellow men. "Wir heissen euch hoffen." The Scottish Puritan in Carlyle never succeeded entirely in silencing that voice.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Chapter VII

<sup>1</sup>C. F. Harrold, Carlyle and German Thought (New York, 1934; rpt. Archon Books, 1963), p. vi.

<sup>2</sup>A. J. LaValley, Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Tennyson, Sartor Called Resartus, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup>Reminiscences, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>The first epigraph is from The Discourses of Epictetus as Reported by Arrian, II, xviii:

The man who is truly practical is he who trains himself against such fantasies. Stay, wretched one, do not be carried away with your impressions. Great is the struggle: the task is divine. The reward is freedom, serenity and an undisturbed state of mind.

The second is from Book IX of the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius:

The course of the universe is torrential. It carries everything with it. How worthless are these political, supposedly practical philosophers! They are full of snot. Well fellows, what then? Do what nature demands now. Begin, and do not look around to see if someone will tell you what to do. Do not hope for Plato's republic. Be content if you advance a short distance; keep in mind that this is no small feat. Who of them all will change his beliefs? Without a change of belief, what else is life but slavery--groaning and obeying.

<sup>6</sup>Philip Rosenberg, The Seventh-Hero, Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>Geoffrey Hartmann, "Wordsworth and Goethe in Literary History," New Literary History 6 (Winter, 1975), p. 408.

<sup>8</sup>Life in London, I, 86.

<sup>9</sup>"Inaugural Address at Edinburgh," Scottish and Other Critical Miscellanies (London: Everyman's Library, Dent, [n.d.]), p. 163.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>11</sup>Illustrated London News, April 14, 1866, p. 366.

<sup>12</sup>"Inaugural Address," p. 161.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 170-71.

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