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President's Letter

The diversity of the papers in this volume is some indication of the energy and width of interest which the Society's programmes continue to show. We welcome the opportunity not only to see something of the vigour and diversity of the century, but to be reminded of how wide and how vigorous were the Carlyles' interests and their engagement with the excitement of the times. Width of vision, too, has been part of the Carlyle Society's remit since the outset, and the Green Bequest (which continues to make possible our publication programme) specifically enjoined on the Society a wider horizon, including the work of Robert Burns on which we hear an important new insight in the next season.

This has been a busy year for the *Carlyle Letters* and the publication of further volumes on the internet (the *Carlyle Letters Online*) means more and more people in many countries are accessing the letters on the internet. With the internet's facility in searching for words, topics and quotations the years of work in footnoting and editing the original texts is now more available, and more used, than ever. This year sees something of a crisis as the funding of the print edition (the foundation of everything the internet shows) has been cut back at a time of widespread financial pressure; the editors are seeking new sources of funding to keep the work going. As the edition is now within sight of its last volumes (38 goes to the printers as these words are written) we very much hope to conclude the series as intended. We will keep the Carlyle Society informed of our progress.

My thanks, as always, to those who have helped with such a successful year last year, have provided their papers, and those who have promised papers for a syllabus next year which looks challenging and excellent. Thanks, too, to the University of Edinburgh for their continued support and hospitality. And thanks, finally, from the President for the party to celebrate his "retirement" which looks like being an active one. It explains the slightly unusual shape of our year's programme as I will be away from Edinburgh rather more than usual, but I look forward (with Aileen Christianson's help at every turn) to the continuing vigour of our society here and overseas.

Ian Campbell
Edinburgh, September 2009

The Carlyles and Opium

Malcolm Ingram

Introduction

At the end of her *Portrait of a Marriage* Rosemary Ashton lists several unsolved problems about the Carlyles, among them this: ‘How addicted was Jane to morphine, opium, and other medicines, and how distorted were her perceptions as a consequence?’ The Dictionary of National Biography article about her (Fielding and Sorensen, 2004) claims that ‘during the Lady Harriet crisis she doped herself with opium,’ and wilder accusations about her mental state and opium use have been made in the past. The assumption that Jane Carlyle abused drugs is worth re-examining. A detailed survey of references to opium in the Carlyle Letters, and a review of the use and abuse of opium in the nineteenth century, provides a convincing answer to Ashton’s question.

Pharmacology

Opium is obtained from the seed heads of the white poppy, whose growth is traditionally associated with the Middle East, with records stretching back to Mesopotamia some 3000 years BC. 95% of the world’s opium now comes from Afghanistan, but in the nineteenth century 80% came from Turkey and the remainder from India. Some white poppies grew wild in England in the Fens and had been used locally for years. From the 1790s the Society of Arts, in London, held an annual competition to encourage the commercial growth of opium in this country. An Edinburgh surgeon, John Young, won the gold medal in 1820, producing even this far north 56 pounds per acre, cannily combining the crop with early potatoes, and making £100 profit. (Booth, 1996) Growing it in large quantities was not a problem, but harvesting it in this country proved too labour-intensive. In Turkey and India child labour was used to cut and squeeze the seed head of the poppy, and to extract and collect the brown juice within. It hardened into cakes, and began its long journey through various markets to this country, usually with considerable adulteration on the way. Raw opium was sold in little parcels, or more often dissolved in alcohol to make tincture of laudanum, the most common form in which it was used. Dozens of other proprietary mixtures contained variable amounts of opium – paregoric was a favourite, as were soothing syrups for infants and children, with pleasing names, such as ‘Street’s Infant Quietness’.

The drugs derived from raw opium are known as opiates. Early in the nineteenth century morphine (or morphia), the main active ingredient of opium, was extracted and identified by chemists, and became available about 1830. Towards the end of the century it became possible to give morphine by injection, and by 1898 heroin, a semi-synthetic product, had been discovered and produced. Since then many synthetic opiates of various strength have been invented, such as codeine, methadone and

pethidine, but in Jane's lifetime there were only opium, laudanum, and morphia. Before 1860 there was no British Pharmacopoeia, and no standards for these drugs; and, because of this and widespread adulteration it was, and is, impossible to know with any confidence what doses were being used and taken.

The actions of opium were the subject of much debate during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some doctors regarding it as a stimulant, some as a sedative. Professor Robert Christison, an Edinburgh poisons expert, carried out experiments in the 1820s and noted that a large dose led to transient excitement, soon followed by torpor and sleep. Today opium is officially classified as a narcotic, but that is misleading. Jane took opiates first and foremost to help her sleep, but many others took them as a pick-me-up, or to recover from a hangover.

Opiates are potent relievers of pain and this has been their main use throughout history, and continues to be so today. Sir William Osler, perhaps the greatest of late nineteenth century physicians, called laudanum 'God's own medicine.' Opium has been a great boon to mankind, and when it was found in 1975 that our bodies had opiate receptors and that we produced our own opium-like substances, endorphins, it confirmed that natural affinity. There were no other effective painkillers until aspirin appeared in 1899.

The other effect of opium is on mood. It produces some euphoria, tranquillity, and a state of emotional detachment, rather than actual drowsiness. Even more than with most drugs there are great individual variations in its effects depending on who is using the drug, what the person's expectations are, and what the setting is. Today opiates are used medically or recreationally. The Victorians had the same classification but talked of 'luxurious' use rather than recreational : 'luxurious' used in the sense of indulgence rather than necessity.

The idea of opium taking as an addiction or disease did not really enter into nineteenth century thinking. Those who did become dependent almost always began by taking the drug for pain and illness, but took ever increasing doses daily and usually reached a plateau at a high dose. Many continued to function well for many years, whether they were labourers or famous novelists like Wilkie Collins. If for some reason their supply was cut off, they suffered severe withdrawal symptoms, and the dependence would come to light. But they were not secretive about their habits, and others did not condemn them, because its consumption had not been criminalized as it is today . Long term consumption of opiates seems to have few physical effects compared with alcoholism, which causes severe damage to the liver and nervous system over the years.

Jane and Opium in the Collected Letters

The Carlyle Letters Online were searched for references to opiates, using the terms 'opium,' 'morphine,' 'morphia,' 'laudanum,' and 'paregoric.' The online volumes, at the time of writing, covered Jane's life up to 1858. For her remaining nine years. the available published sources were used. This is far from scientific: we only have the

letters that survive, and many of the references by Jane to her opium taking are in letters to her husband, and these only occur when they are living apart; but the graph gives a rough idea of her use over the years..

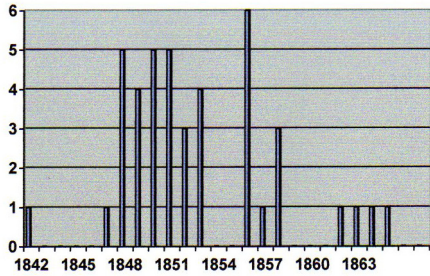


Figure 1: Jane and Opium

In the collected letters there are 80 references to opiates, and of these 42 relate directly to Jane’s consumption of them. For comparison there are 39 references to the Blue Pill, which contains mercury, and 54 to castor oil, both firm Carlyle family favourites. Figure 1 shows only those relating to Jane’s consumption, which are most frequent in the years from 1848 to 1853, and in 1856 and 1857. Carlyle began his friendship with Lady Baring, later Ashburton, in 1843, and domestic tensions and unhappiness increased from then on, and was at its worst in the early 1850s. Lady Ashburton died in 1857. Jane’s street accident took place in 1863, and the severe illnesses that stemmed from it lasted for some two years. During this period she only took opiates when they were prescribed for her, with various doctors trying opiates and then abandoning them.

Perusing these letters is like having the occasional snapshot of her opium use, rather than a continuous film. She gives reasons for taking opium: by far the most references are to sleeplessness(22), usually difficulty in falling asleep, lying awake for hours, and taking opium in desperation later in the night . Others reasons include coughs and colds(5), for which her doctors prescribed opiates, neuralgia(2), headache(1), and a single reference to unhappiness. Next in frequency are side-effects(8). These include weakness, dead feelings, fainting, ‘horrid spasms’, nausea and vomiting, once retching up blood. There are three references to taking excessive or double doses of morphia. Strikingly, there is not a single mention of any pleasurable effect from the drug, and it often does not help her to sleep.

In the 1840s she began to have frequent winter colds and cough. In March, 1848 she writes:

‘...for two months, I have been closely confined to the house, toiling on with morphia and mustard blisters and all sorts of unpleasantnesses—I have never however felt so dreadfully *weak* this winter as I did the last, which my Brother-in-law imputes to his superior doctoring. Last winter I had so much opium and tartar

emetic given me, which John says was “very little better than arsenic” for a person of my constitution.’ (JWC to Mary Russell, 7.3.1848)

Her doctor had given her opium; Dr John gave her the new morphia. 1850 was no better. At the end of January she ‘did not sleep till four in the morning and then (after taking a morphia pill) only slept by snatches – ten minutes or so at a time. In 1851, she made herself worse by accidentally overdosing:

‘I merely wished to get myself some sleep after having gone without it for three nights, and took about four of the third morning a doze of Morphine which might or might *not* have been the right quantity—for the little black pills had melted and run all together and I had to divide them with a pen knife! All next day I felt quite *dead*—as if I were only kept going by Galvanism.....and at night I took to fainting and having horrid spasms..... I still feel sick and sore and miserably *all overish*.’ (JAC to Jeannie Welsh, 5.3.1851)

In 1855-56 Jane recorded her miseries and her drug use in a journal, but was sure that she would not become an addict:

‘My morphia a dead failure last night – gave me neither sleep nor rest; but only nausea. So much the better perhaps. If morphia had *always*, instead of only at long intervals, its *good* effect on me – making me all *whole*, for the time being ...I don’t know what *principle* would be strong enough to keep me from slowly poisoning myself with it.’ (JWC Journal 1855-56, CL, 30, 195-262)

In the summer of 1856 Jane stayed with her friends Dr and Mrs Russell in Thornhill. Dr Russell, the only doctor Jane trusted, cautioned her about her use of drugs, and the ‘injuriousness of Morphia’, and tried to replace it with one or two tablespoonfuls of whisky in hot milk at bedtime. He also told her that she had taken ‘a too serious responsibility on herself’ in doctoring herself through her last illness. (JWC to Mary Russell, 15.3.1857)

At home a month later she was in bed with a cold, and wrote to Mrs Russell: ‘For *five* nights I couldn’t get a wink of sleep—only one night of the five I passed in as near an approach to the blessed state of *Nirwana* as any one not a worshipper of Buddha need aspire to—that was from a doze of Morphia—I had given myself.’ (JWC to Mary Russell, 24.10.1856)

She added: ‘I didn’t mean to take any more morphia after what Dr Russell said about it..... Don’t let him fancy I make a practice of taking morphia whenever I can’t sleep. I hadn’t taken any for four months.’

There is an account of one of Jane’s opium dreams, not from herself but in Caroline Fox’s diary. Fox recorded on 20th May, 1847 that Jane:

‘has been very ill, and the doctors gave her opium and tartar for her cough, which induced, not beautiful dreams and visions, but a miserable feeling of turning to marble herself and lying on marble, her hair, her arms, and her whole person petrifying and adhering to the marble slab on which she lay. One night it was a tombstone,—one in Scotland which she well knew. She lay along it with a graver in her hand, carving her own epitaph under another, which she read and knew by heart.

It was her mother's. She felt utterly distinct from this prostrate figure, and thought of her with pity and love, looked at different passages of her life, and moralised as on a familiar friend. It was more like madness than anything she has ever experienced. "After all," she said, "I often wonder what right I have to live at all."

Through all these years Thomas in his letters was sympathetic about her consumption, but in her last years, when she was ill and being prescribed morphine by her physicians, he wrote to her: 'Glad I am that the subtle Morphine has done its function; be thankful to it, tho' *beware* also.' (TC to JWC, 5/9/1862, New Letters II.265)

Nineteenth Century Attitudes to Opiates

Jane's use of opiates can only be understood in its contemporary context. Up to about 1870, opium and its derivatives were a commodity like any other. It could be grown here, imported freely, sold to anyone, bought by anyone, and was completely unregulated. Opium preparations could be bought in any corner shop, and most families would possess a bottle of laudanum as their medicine cupboard. 20 to 25 drops, an effective dose of laudanum, cost a penny. It was used by the public and by doctors for sleeplessness, colds and coughs, for fatigue and depression, for women's ailments and in childbirth, for earache and toothache, for gout and arthritis, for dysentery, and in the three cholera epidemics that occurred in the 19th century. It was used widely to treat delirium tremens, and even had some effect in slowing the progress of diabetes at a time when insulin had not been discovered. In the Fens there was a long tradition of taking homegrown opium; in poppyhead tea, or added to beer, for the agues and fevers there, and for labourers commencing heavy work. Abundant varieties of soothing syrups were on sale to quieten infants and children, and were used by mothers, especially those working at home, and by baby minders and nannies for their charges, even for babies a few days old. In rural districts it was said to be used to dispose of unwanted children.

In this period doctors were of very mixed ability. It was not until 1858 that a Medical Act was passed, registering qualified practitioners for the first time. Before that many educated men, like Carlyle, would have no hesitation in treating themselves and their family and servants. In 1832 when there was a cholera scare Thomas wrote to John to tell him: 'We here have got two bottles of the best Brandy, with some Laudanum or Paregoric (I rather think the latter) as simple universal stomachic stimulants: I never could hear of aught else the whole noisy Faculty had yet hit upon.' (TC to JAC, 17.10.1832) And the doctors, if consulted, would usually prescribe some form of opium. They had little else; and most of their drugs had no real effect on diseases and could be poisonous – tartar emetic and mercury were widely used. Opium could not cure diseases but it could certainly help many symptoms. Doctors were well aware of this, and some became rich by preparing their own special prescriptions containing opium: Dover's powders, Dr Collis Browne's Chlorodyne, and many others.

Opiates in the letters

Over forty entries in the letters, other than those concerning Jane, further illustrate nineteenth century attitudes to opium, and the experience of it that the Carlyle family had. Thomas took opium, more than once. He wrote to his brother John in 1834, about his mysterious bowel complaints: ‘...in spite of not strong coffee to breakfast, might sometimes require opium rather than aloes.’ (TC to JAC, 22.7.1834) His brother, Dr John, took opium. Thomas told his mother in 1827: ‘We are all well enough here [Comely Bank], except the Doctor, who (shame on his medicine!) is scarcely so well as he used to be at Scotsbrig, and for the last two or three days at least has been complaining of unsound bowels. By opium, I believe, he has cured himself.’ (TC to MAC, 2.1.1827) But, as with Jane, not without side effects, as John wrote to Alexander on the same day: ‘I am in the most deplorable state of stupidity from the influence of drugs &c.’ (JAC to AC, 2.1.1827)

There was opium in London, as a shocked young Thomas discovered in 1823. Carlyle sent a diatribe to Jane about the fashionable rich in London and their futile lives: ‘It is no wonder the poor women take to opium and scandal. (TC to J BW 1.7. 1823) And there was opium in Annandale. When he returned to Mainhill in 1825, he regaled John with the local gossip:

‘Jemmy Bogs has left his place—by moonlight; the dirty scullion! Tom is with his father in *Poverty-raw*; eating opium, and practicing upon the bodies of the indigent and afflicted. Taylor of Lockerby appeared in his pulpit, the Sunday before last, so *drunk* that he could not preach: These are *news* for you: are we not a happy people in this Annandale?’ (TC to JAC 21.3.1825) And some five miles from Craigenputtoch, at Speddoch House, Mrs Smith, the wife of a drunken doctor, boarded patients suffering from ‘Drink and Opium’. (TC to JWC, 7.9.1833)

Mother was given laudanum on her deathbed by her son, Dr John. Their friends took opium. Carlyle described Charles Lamb talking ‘as if he were quarter drunk with ale and half with Laudanum.’ (TC to Thomas Murray, 24 Aug. 1824) Harriet Martineau, unwell in Tynemouth, had a visit from Thomas and wrote to tell Jane about it: ‘For my part, I took plenty of opium, in order thoroughly to enjoy the day....this evening. (opium time again) I know it will all come back again, I shall enjoy it a second time.’ (HM to JWC, 7/1841, quoted CL 13,169-72) The poet William Allingham gave up his job ‘under the influence of opium’, in 1854, and Carlyle wrote letters to try to reinstate him. Badams, who treated Carlyle, died young of ‘brandy and laudanum’ (TC to JAC, 7 July, 1831). In 1850 Jane heard reports that her maid Helen who had been sacked after taking to drink, was ‘wanting sixpence worth of opium to put an end to herself.’

All this is more evidence of the ubiquity of opium, its use and abuse by all ranks of society. The Carlyles were no strangers to its dangers.

Literary and Middle Class Use in the 19th Century

For many years, especially in literary circles, opium in the nineteenth century brought an automatic response: De Quincey, Coleridge, and Kubla Khan. Alethea Hayter's book on 'Opium and the Romantic Imagination' (Hayter, 1962) showed that opium had an effect on literary creation, although De Quincey said that someone who farmed pigs would have pig dreams if he took opium. Carlyle met Coleridge and was unimpressed: '...took to opium and poetic and philosophic dreaming. A better faculty has not been often worse wasted.' (TC to MAC, 5.8.1834) And both the Carlyles knew De Quincey well. (Morrison, 1995, 2004) 'The dwarf opium-eater,' as Carlyle called him after his unfavourable review of Wilhelm Meister, later became a friend, and was nursed through an illness by Jane in Edinburgh. De Quincey later referred to her as the kindest woman he had ever met. Thomas came to like him and was very sympathetic: 'Poor little fellow! It might soften a very hard heart to see him so courteous, yet so weak and poor; retiring *home* with his two children to a miserable lodging-house.' (TC to JAC 29 11 1827)

As well as these two addicts, who wrote of their opium experiences, many in their circle abused the drug (Jones, 1997), but many other writers used opium without becoming dependent.. Byron and Shelley took opium, as did Keats. Scott wrote *The Bride of Lammermoor* while taking large doses for pain, and his wife became dependent on opium. (Hogg, 1999) Dickens used it to get through his readings in America in his last years, and it features in the plot of his last novel, *Edwin Drood*. Elizabeth Barret Browning took ninety drops of laudanum daily from the age of fifteen. (Hayter, 1962) Jane Austen measured out her mother's dose of laudanum nightly. The poet Francis Thompson, author of the *Hound of Heaven*, took opium. Perhaps the most interesting addict of all was Wilkie Collins, who took heroic doses of laudanum for many years and wrote three of his best novels – *Armada*, *No Name*, and *The Moonstone* - while doing so. The plot of *The Moonstone* hinges on opium. Many people, like Collins, started to take opium to relieve severe and chronic pain, and that was the usual path to dependence, but many, even on large doses, showed no physical or mental consequences, seemed unchanged to their friends and families, remained active and productive and did not die prematurely.

All these examples are people who were and remain famous. How many more must there have been, whose lives are not recorded and remembered? There is no such roll call of famous opium takers from the twentieth century and at the present time; alcohol has become the writer's companion. When and how did it all change?

Legislation: 1860s to the present

By the time of Jane's death in 1866, public health enquires were suggesting that the use of opium for infants in the working class was one cause of high infant mortality. The 'luxurious' use of opium as a substitute for alcohol, again in the labouring classes, at a time when the Temperance Movement was becoming active, was also a cause for concern. The Medical Act of 1858 began to regulate and organize doctors and drugs,

and a Pharmacy Act followed in 1868. The medical profession wanted total medical control of opiates, but their proposals were watered down by the pharmacists who feared a loss of income, and until the end of the century the purchase and use of opium, and self medication continued much as before. Berridge (1999) suggests that doctors were merely reflecting the middle class morality of the time in wishing to control drug use among the working class. They were eager to promote the idea that overuse of opium was a disease in need of treatment, an 'addiction', and emphasized the dangers of all opium products, only safe in their hands.

Attitudes and regulation continued to change. After 1900 opium could only be obtained at chemists, but total legal and medical regulation was not reached until the 1920s. Gradually both the drugs and their users were medicalised and criminalised. In the last fifty years there have been world- wide problems caused by illegal drugs, partly of our own creating, although other factors have hastened this. Since late Victorian times the injection of opiates has increased the effect and the danger of addiction, and in the twentieth century heroin, which produces more rapid dependence, gradually came to dominate the drug scene.

Discussion

Past assertions about Jane's opium use can now be discussed in their historical context.

She took opium. Everyone did. 'Opium was as common as aspirin today.' (Berridge, 2002) Every house had a supply of opium for emergencies. It was cheap – cheaper than alcohol. It was not regarded as harmful, and there was no stigma attached to taking the drug. Much of the time Jane's opium was prescribed by her doctors. Opium was one of the few effective drugs available. The laity and doctors alike knew this; it was available to all, so why not save a doctor's bill?

She treated herself and did not take medical advice. Partly true – but everyone did. And throughout her life her doctors prescribed opium for her. And Jane was a doctor's daughter, accompanying her father on his Haddington rounds when she was a teenager, seeing him make up his prescriptions at home, which may have made her feel more carefree about prescribing for herself.

She took opium recklessly. She never ever took opium for luxurious or recreational purposes; she took it for insomnia and cough. Opium was always adulterated. As a result the effect of any particular dose was difficult to predict. And Jane was reckless with all medication, even castor oil. It is by no means uncommon for lay people to believe that if a medicine is effective a bigger dose may be even more effective.

She was addicted to, or dependent on opium. Quite the contrary! There is no evidence that she was physically dependent, or that she took the drug daily, or that she increased the dose, or that she had serious withdrawal signs –all of which occur in those who become addicted. She went for months at a time without opium usually in the summer. In addition she had regular side-effects from taking opium

– lethargy, sickness and general distress - which made her less inclined to indulge in the drug. Her friend Dr Russell in Thornhill, the only doctor in whom she had any real faith, was the only one to reprimand her for her use of opium, but seemed to be more worried about her habit of self-prescribing, her reckless attitude to all drugs, and her not seeking medical advice earlier when unwell. On a later visit to Thornhill, when she became ill, and had brought no opium, he prescribed it for her. And only once do we find her husband expressing the least worry about her consumption. More often he is to be found complaining about the lack of effect of the drug on her, and how all her doctors insist on prescribing it.

This affected her mood and mental state. This claim was made with great vigour by the psychiatrist Sir James Crichton-Browne in his introduction to Jane's letters. (Carlyle, 1903) He was a staunch defender of Carlyle, had a poor opinion of his wife, and said of her letters that : 'They are of scientific interest as presenting an instructive series of studies in neurotics, but they are perhaps a little too bulletinish for the general taste.' He claimed that her overindulgence in morphia had induced unfounded suspicions and even delusions of persecution – unjustly criticizing her husband's attentions to Lady Ashburton. Today almost all sympathy in this episode rests with Jane. Crichton-Browne's accusations are so wild that they scarcely need countering.. There must be more truth in the contrary view: that she took more opium at times because of her distress, or at least that some of her illness and invalidism during that period was related to her marriage, and led in its turn to more doses of morphine for her colds and insomnia and headaches.

Conclusions

Jane was no addict, nor did she use opiates luxuriously. Our modern attitudes to drug use have created our views of Jane, whose behaviour was perfectly normal by the standards of her time and her contemporaries. From the end of the nineteenth century it was the newly powerful doctors like Crichton-Browne who helped to modify our views. He and his colleagues had won the battle against free unrestricted sale of opiates, and were in a position to enforce new legislation and to claim and label opium abuse as a disease.

The biographical study of Jane and Thomas developed parallel to opium becoming subject to regulation and a criminal activity, during the years in which attitudes to opium use were changing rapidly. As a result Jane has been viewed through twentieth and twenty-first century spectacles; a failing which historians call 'presentism'. Today we associate opium abuse with crime, both organized and individual, and with poverty and violence. There is little recognition now that some drug abusers can be dependent for years and yet lead useful and productive lives. Since Jane died opiates and those who take them have been medicalised and criminalised and demonised,. Carlyle biography has done the same for Jane Carlyle: medicalised her, criminalised her, demonised her. It is time for a change.

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**‘A Typical Romantic’: Carlyle and Coleridge Revisited.
Thomas Green Lecture for the Carlyle Society 2008**

Tom Toremans (Catholic University Brussels/Leuven)

In *Twilight of the Idols* Friedrich Nietzsche famously articulated the following view on Carlyle as a ‘typical Romantic’:

I read the life of Thomas Carlyle, that unwitting and involuntary farce, this heroical-moralistical interpretation of dyspepsia. – Carlyle: a man of strong words and attitudes, a rhetorician from *necessity*, continually agitated by the desire for a strong faith *and* the feeling of incapacity for it (– in this respect, a typical Romantic!). The desire for a strong faith is *not* the proof of a strong faith, rather the opposite. *If one has it*, one may permit oneself the beautiful luxury of scepticism: one is secure enough, firm enough, fixed enough for it. Carlyle deafens something within him by the *fortissimo* of his reverence for men of strong faith and by his rage against the less single-minded: he *requires* noise. A continual passionate *dishonesty* towards himself – that is his *proprium*, because of that he is and will remain interesting. – To be sure, in England he is admired precisely on account of his honesty ... Well, that is English; and, considering the English are the nation of consummate cant, even appropriate and not merely understandable. Fundamentally, Carlyle is an English atheist who wants to be honoured for *not* being one.¹ (85-86)

As the opening sentence of the passage indicates, Nietzsche has been reading Carlyle’s biography – most probably, as suggested by Hillis Miller, the German translation of Froude’s *Life* published in 1887 (the year before Nietzsche wrote *Twilight of the Idols*). Nietzsche is thus referring to the body of Carlyle’s work as a whole, which makes his designation of Carlyle as ‘a typical Romantic’ all the more interesting, since it goes against the grain of the modern appreciation of Carlyle as definitively abandoning Romanticism at a relatively early stage in his career.

Without entering into the much-debated relation between Nietzsche and the Romantic tradition,² it is interesting to note that his condemnation of Carlyle as ‘a typical Romantic’ foregrounds a primordially religious condition: Carlyle is a Romantic to the extent that he desperately attempts to articulate a faith that he seems tragically unable to fully acquire.³ At the core of Carlyle’s writing, then, Nietzsche locates a fundamental self-deception that is at the basis of his rhetoric: Carlyle is ‘a rhetorician from *necessity*’ because he is essentially in denial of an anxiety at the heart of his moralistic enterprise. What is more, this rhetorical noise serves as the basis for an uncritical, moralistic hero-worship that is to mask an underlying atheism

that Carlyle seems unable to acknowledge. It is to the extent that Carlyle rhetorically acts out his religious self-deception, Nietzsche argues, that he remains interesting as a paragon of Romanticism.

Nietzsche's characterization of Carlyle as a typical Romantic actually highlights the anachronistic nature of our own, modern application of the term 'Romanticism' to Carlyle. Today – contrary to Nietzsche, who is talking about Carlyle's entire career – we would apply the term 'Romantic' mainly to the early Carlyle, the reviewer of German literature and philosophy and author of the extravagant experiment of *Sartor Resartus*. The Carlyle, also, who is considered to have ended the era of Romanticism with a fictional, poetico-philosophical anti-novel that pushed the genre of the review to its utmost limits and thus paved the way for the socio-political concerns of Victorian literature. This view was most economically formulated by Carlisle Moore in his 1966 essay on Carlyle:

Often regarded as the most Victorian of Victorians, Thomas Carlyle was first of all a romantic. Coeval with Keats, he developed his full literary powers later than any of the other romantics, but wrote some of his most original and durable works, *Sartor Resartus* and the early essays, before 1832, and went on through an active career of nearly threescore years to outlive such great Victorians as Macaulay, Thackeray, Dickens, Mill, and George Eliot. (335)

Moore's claim was well established by the early 1970s, when it had become customary to declare, with M.H. Abrams, that '[t]he successive writings of Thomas Carlyle mark the stages of transition in England from the Romantic to the Victorian preoccupation with alienation and community' (307).⁴ And yet, in his essay on 'Carlyle and German Romanticism' (first published in 1929⁵) René Wellek had already substantially complicated this view. While he claimed that 'there seem to be good reasons to associate Carlyle with the Romantic rather than with the Victorian age' (34), Wellek's subsequent discussion of Carlyle's relation to the German literary and philosophical tradition ended up describing Carlyle's early works as 'the most extraordinary mixture in this great crisis of Europe's philosophical and artistic development', which '[i]ntellectually ... stands before the time of the real English and German Romanticism and chronologically after the tide of the Romantics'. (81) More recently, Carlyle's literary historical status as a passive signpost between the Romantic and the Victorian era has been addressed in increasingly theoretical terms, i.e. in terms of rhetoric rather than those of the history of ideas. In 1978, Janice Haney tentatively adumbrated this shift by suggesting that *Sartor Resartus* has a double historical function: 'as a transitional text that helps us navigate the passage between those two historical periods we call Romantic and Victorian and as a founding text that initiates us into a Victorian frame of mind' (307). In 1991, Chris Vanden Bossche took this foundational function of *Sartor*

significantly further in his *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* by claiming that Carlyle's writings affect the terms of 'Romantic and Victorian to the extent that they are situated between Romanticism and Victorianism', a position that enables Carlyle 'to articulate the problematics of both modes.' (287) And partly basing his argument on Vanden Bossche's study, Claus Schatz-Jakobsen concluded his 2001 essay on Carlyle's 'Characteristics' with the claim that the essay eventually posits the very 'impossibility of conceiving history in universalising or totalising terms' (200). The main purpose of the present paper is to readdress this intricate relation between rhetoric and Romanticism from the point of view of Carlyle's own comments on the substance of his early works as aimed at mediating German Romantic thought to a morally impoverished Britain. Especially Carlyle's dispersed commentaries on that other Romantic mediator of German thought, S.T. Coleridge, foreground the main tenets of Carlyle's ambiguous Romanticism: its rhetorical struggle towards transcendental revelation and its Scottish intellectual context, which distinguishes it from 'English' Romantic thought.

An important preliminary observation in this context is that Carlyle obviously did not refer to himself or contemporaneous authors as 'Romantic'.⁶ Although Schlegel's Classic/Romantic-opposition entered Britain through Coleridge's lectures of 1812 and 1813, the latter were only (partially) published between 1836 and 1839 (in the four-volume *Literary Remains* published by Henry Nelson Coleridge, Samuel Taylor's nephew). And although Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (which Carlyle read early on in his career⁷) was published in London in 1813, the concept of 'Romanticism' did not enter the British literary scene until the second half of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Carlyle refers to the German use of the term on two occasions. In his translation of Jean Paul Richter's review of *de l'Allemagne* (published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1830), Carlyle adds a footnote to the only occurrence of the word 'Romantic' in the review, stating that '*Romantisch*, "romantic", it will be observed, is here used in a scientific sense, and has no concern with the writing or reading ... of "romances".' (643) And in his essay on 'Schiller', published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1831, he says the following:

Indeed, to the Romanticist class, in all countries, Schiller is naturally the pattern man and great master; as it were, a sort of ambassador and mediator, *were mediation possible*, between the Old School and the New; pointing to his own Works, as to a glittering bridge, that will lead pleasantly from the Versailles gardening and artificial hydraulics of the one, into the true Ginnestan and Wonderland of the other. With ourselves too, who are troubled with no controversies on Romanticism and Classicism ... Schiller is no less universally esteemed by persons of any feeling for poetry. (14)

These passages are interesting on two accounts. In the first place, they serve as a reminder that the term 'Romanticism' should be used with caution when referring to Carlyle's early writings. In those rare instances that the term occurs in Carlyle's writings, it does so as technical, or 'scientific', term referring to a German school of thought that had no direct equivalent in Britain. The relegation of 'Romanticism' to German literature indirectly highlights the fact that Carlyle, in Britain, was not part of a 'school' of any kind. When Carlyle refers to those who we today call the 'Romantics', he uses individual names or a denomination such as 'the Lake Poets' (a term introduced by Francis Jeffrey in his 1802 review of Southey's *Thalaba* in the *Edinburgh Review*). Accordingly, considering Carlyle as a late-Romantic runs the risk of somewhat anachronistically assimilating him either to this German tradition or to his fellow British early nineteenth-century critics and authors. What is more, Carlyle, certainly in the years leading up to the writing of *Sartor*, very much considered himself as an 'outsider', and a Scottish one at that.⁸

Secondly, the fragment from the Schiller essay explicitly foregrounds and questions the very *possibility* of the mediation of transcendental vision, which can be perceived in many of Carlyle's reviews. Throughout his career as a reviewer, Carlyle found himself in this paradoxical position of attempting to translate what appeared to resist translation – a paradox that would lead to the ironic fictionalization of this process in *Sartor Resartus*. In fact, with its figure of the bridge and its questioning of the possibility of successful mediation, the passage bears a striking resemblance to the Editor's reflection on his mediating function near the end of *Sartor Resartus*:

Along this most insufficient, unheard-of Bridge, which the Editor ... has now seen himself enabled to conclude if not complete, it cannot be his sober calculation, but only his fond hope, that many have travelled without accident. No firm arch, overspanning the Impassable with paved highway, could the Editor construct; only, as was said, some zigzag series of rafts floating tumultuously thereon. Alas, and the leaps from raft to raft were too often of a breakneck character (197)

Both Carlyle's position as an 'outsider' and his recurring explicit foregrounding of the possibility of the successful mediation of German literature are essential to his relation to what we refer to today as 'Romanticism'. For Carlyle, 'Romanticism' was in the first place a German technical term that did not apply to the intellectual culture in which he moved. In his turn to German literature and philosophy for appropriate models, he was inevitably confronted with the rhetorical complexity of this 'Romantic' mode and the apparent impossibility of its translation into English. Both aspects can also be seen at work in Carlyle's ambiguous relation to the main aesthetic theorist who preceded him in his attempt to mediate between German and British culture, S.T. Coleridge. A brief reconsideration of Carlyle's dispersed

comments on Coleridge will enable us to delineate the finer shades of Carlyle's alleged 'Romanticism'.

As Rosemary Ashton has argued in *The German Idea*, Coleridge and Carlyle are the two key figures who definitively changed the perception of German thought in nineteenth-century Britain and laid the foundations for the later engagements with German philosophy and literature by Eliot, Mill, Arnold, Hutton and J.H. Sterling. As Ashton also points out, Coleridge was 'less interested in the literature of Germany than its theory' (3). Contrary to Henry Crabb Robinson, Thomas De Quincey and Carlyle, he was probably the only one to have actually read through Kant's three critiques and, as such, counted as an authority in that field. From the considerable body of scholarly work that has been done on the relation between Carlyle and Coleridge,⁹ the general picture that emerges is that of Carlyle as 'an unconscious continuator of Wordsworth and Coleridge' (Cazamian 54) who was at the same time 'extremely reluctant to admit the indebtedness (Sanders 37). Underlying this ambiguous relation to the 'Romantics' is thus again a certain self-deception, an apparent unwillingness on the part of Carlyle to acknowledge a characteristic at the centre of his thought.¹⁰

Carlyle was recommended by Edward Irving to read Coleridge as early as 1816 and visited him on several occasions in 1824 and 1825.¹¹ Immediately after one of these visits to Highgate, Carlyle wrote to his brother John, describing 'the Kantian metaphysician and quondam Lake poet' as 'a man of great and useless genius'.¹² Carlyle's disappointment with this 'strange not at all a great man' mainly derived from his moral condemnation of Coleridge's 'anxious impotence': although 'a kind, good soul, full of religion and affection, and poetry and animal magnetism', Coleridge's 'cardinal sin is that he wants *will*; he has no resolution, he shrinks from pain or labour in any of its shapes.' Carlyle's moral condemnation was undoubtedly strengthened by his disappointment over Coleridge's inability to successfully explain his philosophical insights. Instead of providing Carlyle with a clear exposition of Kant's philosophy that would supplement his knowledge of German Romantic literature, Coleridge's digressions appeared to Carlyle as empty rhetoric. Listening to Coleridge was like entering a 'forest of thoughts; some true, many false, most part dubious, all of them ingenious in some degree, often in a high degree.' There was 'no method in his talk', guided as he was by a 'lazy mind'. In fact, Coleridge could not 'speak', he could only '*tal-k*'. In the letters he wrote during the period of his visits to Coleridge, Carlyle repeatedly foregrounds Coleridge's accent, as if to stress the geographical and national divide between them. In a later letter to John, for example, Carlyle complains that 'in points either of intellectual or moral culture' Londoners are some degrees below even the inhabitants of 'the Modern Athens' and that Coleridge stands out between them as 'a mass of richest spices, putrified into a

dunghill’, adding that he ‘can never hear him *tawlk*, without feeling ready to worship him and toss him in a blanket’.¹³ A few months later, Carlyle again writes to John, mentioning that

I heard Coleridge *tawlk* one night a fortnight since. He took an ounce of snuff, speculated in half intelligible Kantism, and vilipended universal nature, in all her productions, but himself.¹⁴

This combined emphasis on Coleridge’s Englishness and the incomprehensibility of his philosophical excursions points at the simultaneous complication by Carlyle of the rhetorical peculiarities of mediating German thought and of his own position as an ‘outsider’ to the intellectual debate ensuing therefrom.

In his retrospective comments on his visits in *The Life of John Sterling*, Carlyle summarized his view on Coleridge as follows:

But indeed, to the young ardent mind, instinct with pious nobleness, yet driven to the grim deserts of Radicalism for a faith, his speculations had a charm much more than literary, a charm almost religious and prophetic. The constant gist of his discourse was lamentation over the sunk condition of the world; which he recognized to be given up to Atheism and Materialism, full of mere sordid misbeliefs, mispursuits and misresults. All Science had become mechanical; the science not of men, but of a kind of human beavers. Churches themselves had died away into a godless mechanical condition; and stood there as mere Cases of Articles, mere Forms of Churches; like the dried carcasses of once swift camels, which you find left withering in the thirst of the universal desert, – ghastly portents for the present, beneficent ships of the desert no more. Men’s souls were blinded, hebetated; and sunk under the influence of Atheism and Materialism, and Hume and Voltaire: the world for the present was as an extinct world, deserted of God, and incapable of well-doing till it changed its heart and spirit. This, expressed I think with less of indignation and with more of long-drawn querulousness, was always recognizable as the ground-tone: – in which truly a pious young heart, driven into Radicalism and the opposition party, could not but recognize a too sorrowful truth; and ask of the Oracle, with all earnestness, What remedy, then? (245-246)

Written in 1851, this passage actually reads as a retrospective self-commentary by Carlyle on his own literary practice in the 1820s and early 1830s: the aspiration towards prophecy, the overall condemnation of materialism as pervading man’s physical and moral being, and the revolt against Humean atheism are reminiscent of the tone and substance of many of Carlyle’s early essays. Not surprisingly, then,

Carlyle is careful not to 'be unjust to this memorable man' and acknowledges that 'there was ... in his pious, ever-labouring, subtle mind a ... prefigurement of truth': Coleridge prefigured that 'man and his Universe were eternally divine; and that no past nobleness, or revelation of the divine, could or would ever be lost to him.' Coleridge's 'fatal delusion', however, had been the assumption that the Divine Idea could be grasped in a philosophical rhetoric based on logical reasoning.

But, on the whole, do not think you can, by logical alchemy, distil astral spirits from them; or if you could, that said astral spirits, or defunct logical phantasms, could serve you in anything. What the light of your mind, which is the direct inspiration of the Almighty, pronounces incredible,—that, in God's name, leave uncredited; at your peril do not try believing that. No subtlest hocus-pocus of 'reason' versus 'understanding' will avail for that feat; — and it is terribly perilous to try it in these provinces! (247)

Carlyle here makes a sharp distinction between acquiring insight and successfully communicating this insight and in addition emphasises the divine origin of ideas, an origin that should be recognized as such and should not be subjected to further analysis or speculation. And again, although more indirectly, Carlyle's Scottish intellectual context resurfaces. The passage resembles an attack on Coleridge made by James Ferrier in his famous article on 'The Plagiarisms of S.T. Coleridge', published in *Blackwood's* in 1840:

It must be remembered that we are at present speaking of Coleridge only in reference to his connection with the transcendental philosophy. He lays a good deal of stress on his possession of 'the main and fundamental ideas' of that system. We ourselves, on our day, have had some small dealings with 'main and fundamental ideas', and we know this much about them, that it is very easy for any man or for every man to *have them*. There is no difficulty in that. The difficulty lies in bringing them intelligibly, effectively and articulately *out* — in elaborating them into clear and intelligible shapes; for this appears to be the nature of fundamental ideas — the more you endeavour to extrude them, the stronger does their propensity become to run inwards and to get out of sight. (291)

Carlyle makes a very similar point when he writes in *The Life of Sterling*:

He had knowledge about many things and topics, much curious reading; but generally all topics led him, after a pass or two, into the high seas of theosophic philosophy, the hazy infinitude of Kantian

transcendentalism, with its ‘sum-m-mjects’ and ‘om-m-mjects.’ Sad enough; for with such indolent impatience of the claims and ignorances of others, he had not the least talent for explaining this or anything unknown to them; and you swam and fluttered in the mistiest wide unintelligible deluge of things, for most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner.¹⁵ (244)

To be sure, Ferrier’s criticism of Coleridge would equally apply to Carlyle. Neither Coleridge, nor Carlyle were professional or systematic philosophers and it is precisely their *literary* (non-systematic, rhetorical) mode of responding to German Idealism that makes them so interesting. But Ferrier’s attack on Coleridge *does* highlight the Scottish context of Common Sense philosophy (which Ferrier was at the time had not vehemently attacked yet) and the continuation of the Scottish philosophical engagement with German philosophy in the works of Dugald Stewart and William Hamilton.¹⁶ It should suffice here to note the complication of the straightforward opposition between British, Scottish and German philosophy, as becomes clear from a letter Carlyle wrote to two students in 1841:

Once master of Kant, you have attained what I reckon most precious, perhaps alone precious in that multifarious business of German philosophy: namely, deliverance from the fatal incubus of Scotch or French philosophy, with its mechanisms and its Atheisms, and be able perhaps to wend on your way leaving both of them behind you. In fine, if you prosecute the study, it will be well to consult Sir William Hamilton, your neighbour, probably your former teacher; he of all men, British or foreign, is the best acquainted with the bibliography of German and other metaphysics, the ablest, therefore, to direct you towards books in any specific case. A Mr. Ferrier of your city I believe to be likewise worth inquiring of. On this business of metaphysics, I know not that I can safely counsel further. Go on, and prosper.¹⁷

While Carlyle himself did not engage in systematic philosophical argument – be it German or Scottish – this passage paints a more subtle picture of philosophical traditions beyond the mere opposition between German, English and Scottish philosophy. And it is in this space that Carlyle’s *literary* response, as distinct from Coleridge’s, to transcendental philosophy should be situated, as it explores the possibility of the latter’s successful translation into a singular idiom.

At different times, then, Carlyle’s comments highlight his own engagement with German Romanticism as a practice of translating the latter to an intellectual

culture that distinguished itself, in his mind, from Coleridge's. Crucially, this different philosophical context is paralleled by a retrospective diagnosis of a more straightforwardly rhetorical kind. In his 1929 essay on Novalis, Carlyle had still defended Coleridge's obscurity, while staging him next to Novalis as a lesser genius:

Our Coleridge's *Friend*, for example, and *Biographia Literaria* are but a slight business compared with these *Schriften*; ... yet Coleridge's works were triumphantly condemned by the whole reviewing world, as clearly unintelligible; and among readers they have still but an unseen circulation; ... [W]hy ... are his doctrines to be thrown out of doors, without examination, as false and worthless, simply because they are obscure? Or how is their so palpable falsehood to be accounted for to our minds, except on this extraordinary ground: that a man able to originate deep thoughts (such is the meaning of genius) is unable to *see* them when originated; that the creative intellect of a Philosopher is destitute of that mere faculty of logic which belongs to 'all Attorneys, and men educated in Edinburgh'?

At the time of writing *The Life of Sterling*, however, Carlyle had lost all patience with the rhetoric of Idealism. Consider, for example, the following passage in which Coleridge's inability to explain his transcendental insights is condemned as symptomatic of a lack of comprehensibility mere empty rhetoric

Eloquent artistically expressive words you always had; ... but in general you could not call this aimless, cloud-capt, cloud-based, lawlessly meandering human discourse of reason by the name of 'excellent talk,' but only of 'surprising' ... His life had been an abstract thinking and dreaming, idealistic, passed amid *the ghosts of defunct bodies* and of unborn ones. The moaning singsong of that theosophico-metaphysical monotony left on you, at last, a very dreary feeling. (245, *emph. added*)

Coleridge was lost in abstraction: his words were expressive, but signified nothing. Particularly interesting in this passage is the phrase 'ghosts of defunct bodies':— a phrase too poetic to be just an innocent twist of words.¹⁸ And indeed, the phrase *does* refer to a text that had been with Carlyle since his earliest reading:

Beside, he was a shrewd PHILOSOPHER,
And had read ev'ry text and gloss over;
Whate'er the crabbed'st author hath,
He understood b' implicit faith
Whatever sceptic could inquire for,

For ev'ry why he had a wherefore;
 Knew more than forty of them do,
 As far as words and terms cou'd go.
 All which he understood by rote
 And, as occasion serv'd, would quote;
 No matter whether right or wrong,
 They might be either said or sung.
 His notions fitted things so well,
 That which was which he could not tell;
 But oftentimes mistook th' one
 For th' other, as great clerks have done.
 He could reduce all things to acts,
 And knew their natures by abstracts;
 Where entity and quiddity,
 The ghosts of defunct bodies fly;
 Where truth in person does appear,
 Like words congeal'd in northern air.
 He knew what's what, and that's as high
 As metaphysic wit can fly;

The 'ghosts of defunct bodies' in this fragment refer to the separation of words from reality, the emergence of a dead language of essences that is neither right or wrong and that can be quoted from philosopher's books at will. The words congeal in northern air: they are frozen, dead signifiers that do nothing but perpetuate metaphysical speculation *ad infinitum* as an endless substitution of words for things. The passage is taken from the opening of the first Canto of Part One of Samuel Butler's satirical poem 'Hudibras', written between 1660 and 1680. It is probably one of the first works Carlyle ever read, as he indicates in a note written in the margins of a biographical article on him by the German critic and journalist Friedrich Althaus:¹⁹

[P]erhaps it was little De Quincey's reported admiration of Jean Paul ('Goethe a mere *corrupted* pigmy to him' &c) that first put me upon trying to be orthodox and admire. I dimly felt poor De Quincey (who passed for a mighty seen in such things) to have exaggerated, and to know, perhaps, but little of either Jean Paul or Goethe (which was the fact); however, I held on reading and considerably ... admiring Jean Paul, on my own score, tho' always with something of (secret) disappointment. Should now *wish*, perhaps, that I hadn't? – My *first* favourite books had been *Hudibras* & *Tristram Shandy* ... Edward Irving and his admiration of the Old Puritans & Elizabethans ... his and everybody's doctrine on that head, played a much more important part than Jean Paul upon my poor 'style'; – & the most

important by far was that of Nature, you would perhaps say, had you ever heard my Father speak, or very often heard my Mother, and her inborn melodies of heart and voice! (*Two Reminiscences* 58-59)

Carlyle makes this remark in 1866, in a little known series of notes that is of crucial importance for the biographical study of his retrospective views on *Sartor Resartus* and his career as a reviewer of German literature that preceded it. The year 1866 signaled Carlyle's eventual retreat from the intellectual scene after his appointment as Rector of Edinburgh University and Jane's death. Although the remark may thus bear the marks of a nostalgic repainting of the past, it is nevertheless interesting in that it grounds Carlyle's rhetorical style in nature, in the speech of his mother and father. Taken in the context of this passage, Carlyle's use of the phrase 'ghosts of defunct bodies' with reference to Coleridge gains particular strength as the observation that Coleridge had actually spent his entire life amidst a dead, lifeless and abstract rhetoric that directly resulted from his intense engagement with German philosophy. Importantly, Carlyle retrospectively grounds his own rhetorical style in nature, in the speech of his mother and father. Contrary to Coleridge, then, what Carlyle was tragically struggling with in the 1820s and 1830s, at the moment of his most intense reading of German Romanticism, was *not* the weakness of flesh and blood or a want of a strong will, but the apparent impossibility of making the transcendental vision of the German Romantics alive in the English language, of articulating, in the words of *Sartor*, Romantic vision in a language that would be the 'Flesh-Garment, the Body, of *Thought*.' (56). The passage thus indicates another retrospective criticism of his own early critical practice as the misguided attempt at forging a prophetic language from the rhetoric of German Romanticism. In 1835, Carlyle had still confidently defended such a creation of a new language in a letter to John Sterling, responding to the latter's complaint that *Sartor* suffered from figurative excess. To successfully articulate his thoughts, Carlyle argued, 'I see nothing for it but you must use words not found there, must make words, with moderation and discretion of course', and with 'whole ragged battalions of Scott's novel Scotch, with Irish, German, French, and even newspaper Cockney ... storming in on us, and the whole structure of our Johnsonian English breaking up from its foundations, revolution there is visible as everywhere else.'²⁰

Carlyle's ambiguous relation to Coleridge and his retrospective comments on his own rhetorical experiments in his reviews and *Sartor* thus highlight a degree of self-confessed self-deception that conditioned his early writings. This self-deception, moreover, was only available to him in the mode of a specifically *rhetorical* struggle. Already in the period immediately following the composition and serial publication of *Sartor*, Carlyle's ambivalence towards rhetoric is legible in many of his letters.

In 1834, one year before defending his style against Sterling's accusations, he wrote to Emerson:

my view is that now at last we have lived to see all manner of Poetics and Rhetorics and Sermonics, and one may say generally all manner of Pulpits for addressing mankind from, as good as broken and abolished: alas, yes; if you have any earnest meaning, which demands to be not only listened to, but believed and done, you cannot (at least I cannot) utter it there, but the sound sticks in my throat, as when a Solemnity were felt to have become a Mummery; and so one leaves the pasteboard coulisses, and three Unities, and Blair['s Lectures, quite behind; and feels only that there is nothing sacred, then, but the Speech of Man to believing Men!²¹

This tension between religion and rhetoric, belief and language, is what drove Carlyle's practice as reviewer and translator to the dead end of *Sartor Resartus*, which develops as a final farewell, not to the visionary substance of German Romanticism, but to the attempt at translating it into a singular idiom based on the rhetoric of German Romantic literature. If, as Nietzsche argued, this tension between rhetoric and religion is what makes Carlyle interesting, it primarily does so because it presents us with a specifically *literary* response to German aesthetic and philosophical thought – one which, moreover, distinguishes itself in tone and substance from the example by which it had been preceded.

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Notes

References to Carlyle's letters are to the online edition (CLO), followed by the volume and page numbers of the printed edition (CL) in square brackets

¹For comments on this passage, see Tambling and Miller's 'Hieroglyphical Truth' (*Victorian Subjects* 301-319).

²For useful overviews of commentaries on Nietzsche's complex relation to 'Romanticism', see del Caro and Norman.

³Nietzsche is probably building on Froude's famous description of Carlyle as a 'Calvinist without the theology'. Further in *Twilight*, Nietzsche emphasises this religious core of Carlyle's thought when he states that the 'Englishman has only two possible ways of coming to terms with the genius and "great man": either the *democratic* way in the manner of Buckle or the *religious* way in the manner of Carlyle.' (109) The standard biographical accounts of Carlyle's religion and its Scottish background are those provided by Ian Campbell, for example in his *Thomas Carlyle and 'Carlyle's Religion'*.

⁴Apart from borrowing its title from *Sartor Resartus*, M.H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* marks an important moment in the reception of *Sartor*, specifically by including it into an historical narrative of English and German Romantic literary and philosophical reactions to the French Revolution. Abrams' reading of Carlyle counts as exemplary for the reception of Carlyle in the early 1970s to the extent that it inscribes his work in an historical narrative of modernity's origin in the European literary and philosophical tradition of Romanticism. Another such instance is LaValley's *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern*, which reads Carlyle's work in relation to, among others, Marx and Nietzsche. See also Abrams' dispersed comments on Carlyle in *The Mirror and the Lamp*.

⁵The essay first appeared in *Xenia Pragensia Ernesto Kraus et Josepho Janko sexagenario ab amicis collegis discipulis oblate* (Prague: Sumptibus Societatis Neophilologorum, 1929. 375-403) and was republished in the 1965 volume *Confrontations*.

⁶For a history of the term 'Romantic', see Day's *Romanticism* (79-104). For more detailed studies of the history of the term, see Wellek's 'The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History' and Eichner.

⁷See Harrold's discussion of de Staël's influence on Carlyle's vision of German literature in his *Carlyle and German Thought* (55-59). Apart from his translation of Jean Paul's review of *De l'Allemagne* discussed below, Carlyle also published 'Schiller, Goethe and Madame de Staël', a translation of the correspondence between Goethe and Schiller on de Staël, in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1832.

⁸A beautiful evocation of Carlyle's literal isolation in this period can be found in the letter he wrote to Goethe when in Craigenputtoch (Thomas Carlyle to Goethe, 25 September 1828, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18280925-TC-G-01 [CL 4: 404-409]).

⁹Charles Sanders provided an excellent overview of Carlyle's references to Coleridge in 'The Background of Carlyle's Portrait of Coleridge in *The Life of Sterling*' (*Carlyle's Friendships* 36-60) and charted their religious argument on the Church of England in his *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement*. Comparative studies of Coleridge's and Carlyle's ideas were provided in C.F. Harrold's *Carlyle and German Thought* (50-54), Wellek's *Immanuel Kant in England and Confrontations*, Burdett's *The Two Carlyles* and Cazamian's *Carlyle*. See also the articles by Anderson, Wendling and Sørensen.

¹⁰It is interesting to indicate that in 1824, Carlyle actually suggested a collaboration with Coleridge on a translation of *Goethe's Life* to the Edinburgh publisher George Boyd: 'My friends here [in London] are full of compliments about the success &c of *Meister*; many of them are advising

me (with Mr Blackwood) to go on in translating German works, as a province of literature at once unoccupied and likely to be profitable as well as instructive. Their persuasions, aided by my own judgement of the case, have so far prevailed upon me that I now write to consult *you* upon the subject; conceiving myself bound to take your advice at least in a part of my project before proceeding any farther with it ... *Goethe's Life* ... has also been passing thro' my mind: I think it would make an excellent thing, only it would be rather long, its extent if I remember right being fully twice that of *Meister*. ... I could also command *notes* to it from Coleridge if necessary; and from another gentleman personally known to Goethe, and familiar with all the late literary history of Germany as of England. This I think would be a[n] advantage. What do you say?' (Thomas Carlyle to George Boyd, 5 July 1824. *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18240705-TC-GBO-01 [CL 3: 101-103])

¹¹ See Carlyle's famous account of these visits in *The Life of John Sterling* (241-247) and in his letters. As Carlyle records in his reminiscence of Edward Irving, 'Early in 1825 was my last sight of him'. (*Reminiscences* 252)

¹² Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 24 June 1824, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18240624-TC-JAC-01 [CL 3: 88-92].

¹³ Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 22 January 1825, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18250122-TC-JAC-01 [CL 3: 259-263].

¹⁴ Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 7 March 1825, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18250307-TC-JAC-01 [CL 3: 296-300].

¹⁵ Moreover, Ferrier's metaphor of swim bladders ('... not being able to swim in the transcendental depths without Schelling's bladders, and Schelling's bladders not being sufficiently inflated to support him here...') is repeated by Carlyle: 'He began anywhere: you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation: instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers and other precautionary and vehicular gear, for setting out; perhaps did at last get under way,—but was swiftly solicited, turned aside by the glance of some radiant new game on this hand or that, into new courses; and ever into new; and before long into all the Universe, where it was uncertain what game you would catch, or whether any.' (244)

¹⁶ It is impossible to discuss Carlyle's relation to Common Sense philosophy in this short space. An excellent and very timely intervention in this field is Ralph Jessop's *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*.

¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle to Francis Espinasse and Henry Dunipace, 28 August 1841, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18410828-TC-FEHD-01 [CL 13: 227-229]. Already in 1833, Carlyle wrote to Henry Inglis: 'Remember me to Ferriar [*sic*] and Colquhon; I still think of them as of the hopefulest I saw in Edinburgh.' (Thomas Carlyle to Henry Inglis, 8 October 1833, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18331008-TC-HI-01 [CL 7: 11-13].

¹⁸ Carlyle also uses the phrase to depict the English aristocracy in *Chartism*: 'Man is man everywhere; dislikes to have "sensible species" and "ghosts of defunct bodies" foisted on him, in England even as in France.' (58)

¹⁹ The article in question ('Thomas Carlyle, Eine biographisch-literarische Charakteristik') was published in the German periodical *Unsere Zeit* in 1866 and Carlyle's notes were published in *Two Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle* (1-128).

²⁰ Thomas Carlyle to John Sterling, 4 June 1835, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18350604-TC-JOST-01 [CL 8: 134-138].

²¹ Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 12 August 1834, *CLO* 10.1215/lt-18340812-TC-RWE-01 [CL 7: 262-267]: 1-8.

Intelligence and civilisation: Thomas Carlyle and Godfrey Thomson on the role of intelligence in governance and political involvement

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“...it is necessary to ask about the dependence of civilisation on intelligence and about the relative importance, to civilisation, of intelligence and other qualities.”
(Thomson, 1937a, from the Ludwig Mond lecture)

Countries don't run by themselves. The processes of governance and political involvement can be carried out more or less well. So, concerned and influential thinkers have applied their reasoning to how these might be done optimally. Psychological issues are central to their concerns. Specifically, the cognitive and moral qualities of those who contribute to the political system are often raised. But the lineaments of cognitive quality are not given. The political thinker who wishes to enumerate desirable qualities of contributors to a system of governance must first have some identified psychological qualities in mind. And when these have been decided upon, there are the problems of: finding people with these qualities; nurturing them where that is possible; and worrying about whether the system of governance has a way of identifying and employing such talent. This paper will illustrate and discuss how Thomas Carlyle addressed these issues in some of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. In parallel, it will discuss the contributions of Professor Sir Godfrey Thomson to these matters—especially in his Ludwig Mond Lecture of 1936—and compare them with those of Carlyle. Two themes emerge in Carlyle's and Thomson's thinking: the association between human cognitive and moral qualities; and the problems of searching for people with cognitive talents in a population.

It is not necessarily the case that people's backgrounds determine their intellectual interests, but it is at least interesting that Carlyle and Thomson have parallels in their backgrounds and later came to worry about similar matters concerning how civilisations can obtain the best people to contribute to their running. Thomas Carlyle's personal history is too well known to readers of this journal to require describing here. Godfrey Hilton Thomson (1881-1955) was born in the year that Carlyle died. He was born in Carlisle—not far from Carlyle's birthplace and childhood—but his family moved to Felling in Northumberland soon after his birth. Thomson's father was absent, and he was brought up by his mother and an aunt. His family was working class, and he was destined to become a

pattern maker. He was identified at school as an intelligent boy, and became a pupil teacher. He took a first degree in the UK and then a PhD in physics at Strasbourg, then in German Alsace. He was on the staff of Armstrong College in Newcastle—part of the University of Durham—until 1925, rising to Professor of Education. He moved to Edinburgh in 1925, to the Bell Chair in Education and the Directorship of the Moray House [Teacher] Training College—and stayed there until his retirement in 1951. His research work and public lectures concentrated on the study of human intelligence. He worked on the theory and statistical analysis of human intelligence differences. He was the originator of the hugely successful Moray House Test series of mental tests that were used in the decisions about transfer from primary to secondary school in England. In a post-retirement speech to educational researchers, Thomson (1953, p. 11) stated that he had three passions in his professional life: mathematics, educational research and,

“the feeling that I had a moral duty to do everything possible to improve methods of discovering intelligent children who might be overlooked, and guiding them into forms of higher education likely both to make them happier in their lot, and useful to a society and civilisation which needs them.”

This short quotation raises four key points about Thomson’s thinking. The first is, that, because the identification of his being intelligent, though poor, he had a moral duty to help others in the same situation. He mentions this explicitly in his autobiographical writings (Thomson, 1952, 1969). The second is the pervading importance of intelligence as a human quality. The third is that intelligence must be developed through education. The fourth is that such nurturing benefits the society in which the individual lives. Summarising Carlyle’s and Thomson’s backgrounds and interests, then, finds them being raised close-by geographically, originating from similarly humble backgrounds, being highly socially mobile because of their intelligence and drive, and spending their mature professional years thinking about how to maximise the intelligence being applied to optimising the state of nations.

A difference between Thomson and Carlyle is that Thomson began his professional life after the invention of mental tests. He developed this technology himself, and contributed to the theory of mental functioning on which it was based. Therefore, his interest in intelligence’s place in civilisation was an application of this technology: he was developing tools for the personal and greater good. Carlyle’s writings, on the other hand, occur long before intelligence tests were invented, and so he is faced with identifying the mental qualities he discusses without Thomson’s ready-to-hand tools (Thomson, 1940). However, there were civilisations that had developed technologies to select people for their executive, at least. For over 1000 years, China had a massive system of local and national examinations that were the routes to civil office (Miyazaki, 1981). Their content was based on classical Chinese culture, literature and philosophy. Coincidentally, the last examinations

occurred in 1905, the year in which the first intelligence test was invented, in France (Elman, 2000).

Although Thomson and Carlyle both thought intelligence was an important quality of people who would contribute to the running of a nation, the similarities between the two should not be overstated. Thomson was a democrat, and Carlyle was far from that in his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. Thomson's clearest statement of how he saw intelligence linked to the operating of a civilisation was his Ludwig Mond Lecture to the University of Manchester in 1936 (Thomson, 1936, 1937). This has been reprinted with an extensive commentary and reference list (Deary et al., in press), and only the relevant summary points will be made in this paper for the purposes of comparing it with Carlyle's writings. The Mond Lecture is unusual for Thomson. Beyond his typical lectures on mental testing in education, he was using the topic of mental testing in education to address the preservation of civilisation against the rise of fascism in Germany. Similarly, there is no doubt that Carlyle viewed high intelligence as civilisation-preserving. In Downing Street he writes that,

“And know always, and even lay to heart with a quite unusual solemnity, with a seriousness altogether of a religious nature, that as “Human Stupidity” is verily the accursed parent of all this mischief, so Human Intelligence alone, to which and to which only is victory and blessedness appointed here below, will or can cure it. If we knew this as devoutly as we ought to do, the evil, and all other evils were curable;--alas, if we had from of old known this, as all men made in God's image ought to do, the evil never would have been! Perhaps few Nations have ever known it less than we, for a good while back, have done. Hence these sorrows.”

From the Thomson's Mond Lecture and from, especially, Carlyle's *Downing Street* and *New Downing Street* pamphlets, there emerge two further remarkably similar themes. The first is that both thought there was an association between high intellectual and moral qualities. The second is that both devoted much thought to the method of identifying those with high intelligence.

A link between cognitive and moral qualities

In the Mond Lecture Thomson writes that, “the tendency is for a correlation of intellect with good character.” He states that there are exceptions but he thinks there is a general rule: “self-control and tolerance which, in the main, go with intellect, good points of character.” Similarly, in *Model Prisons*, Carlyle writes, “Stupidity intellectual and stupidity moral (for the one always means the other, as you will, with surprise or not, discover if you look)”. And, in *Downing Street*, he writes,

“That a man of Intellect, of real and not sham Intellect, is by the nature of

him likewise inevitably a man of nobleness, a man of courage, rectitude, pious strength... Human Intellect, if you consider it well, is the exact summary of Human *Worth*; and the essence of all worth-ships and worships is reverence for that same.”

It is unusual to find this in psychology, but Thomson agreed with Carlyle that positive intellectual and moral qualities tend to go together. In his Mond Lecture, Thomson stated that, “the tendency is for a correlation of intellect with good character.” He admitted exceptions to this general rule but, in general, “self-control and tolerance which, in the main, go with intellect, good points of character.” Unlike Carlyle, Thomson did not necessarily view intellect and moral qualities as linked by nature. Rather, there is the mediating force of education,

“Intellect is, in the main, necessary to character, or at least is its accompaniment.... The intelligence must of course be fed with a good education. I do not mean an education of the character, which invariably means indoctrination with some code or other, but a good intellectual education. The Soul is to be *turned* from the world of becoming to that of being by a true art of education.”

Beyond *how* cognitive and moral qualities are linked, there is the question of whether they are. For example, a modern writer has identified higher intelligence and higher levels of the personality trait of conscientiousness as the key predictors of more successful people and nations (Lynn, 1996). Yet, Lynn is discussing qualities that are statistically independent. For him, it is the co-occurrence of these uncorrelated traits that is needed for a successful civilisation. However, other research does find that children with higher intelligence have, as adults, more tolerant social attitudes (Deary et al., 2008).

In addition to his ideas about intelligence and moral qualities, Carlyle’s writings on psychological qualities have another modern relevance. There has long been debate—some of it very technical—in psychology about the number of different types of intelligence that exist. Among the types of intelligence mentioned by Carlyle in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* there are, “natural wisdom,” “really human,” “red-tapish,” “owlish and pedantical,” “beaver,” “vulpine,” “sham,” “real.” And there are others. The likelihood is that, for many of these, they are actually the occurrence of intelligence in people with different personality traits that are not correlated with intelligence. They are probably intelligence seen through the lens of various personality traits.

Carlyle sought a special kind of intellect for political leadership, one that was combined with high moral development. There were others, not to be denigrated, but not fit for high office. In *New Downing Street* he writes,

“the intellect of the Nineteenth Century, so full of miracle to Heavyside

and others, is itself a mechanical or *beaver* intellect rather than a high or eminently human one. A dim and mean though authentic kind of intellect, this; venerable only in defect of better. This kind will avail but little in the higher enterprises of human intellect, especially in that highest enterprise of guiding men Heavenward, which, after all, is the one real “governing” of them on this God’s-Earth:--an enterprise not to be achieved by beaver intellect, but by other higher and highest kinds.”

Further, he writes,

“If Governments neglect to invite what noble intellect there is, then too surely all intellect, not omnipotent to resist bad influences, will tend to become beaverish ignoble intellect; and quitting high aims, which seem shut up from it, will help itself forward in the way of making money and such like; or will even sink to be sham intellect, helping itself by methods which are not only beaverish but vulpine, and so “ignoble” as not to have common honesty.”

The riddle (Carlyle) and the sieve (Thomson): finding the right people to govern

Carlyle devoted much space, and Thomson devoted much of his working life, to thinking about how to find people with special intellect, so that they could make a contribution to civilization. They were advocating—in Thomson’s case actually practising—the same sort of nationwide screening for the brightest individuals. They were not aiming towards the same end. For Carlyle, the aim was a meritocratic search for those special intellects who would govern. For Thomson, the aim was more complex, a combination of matching education to people’s intellect, and of an ideal that an educated society was a better one. Here is Carlyle writing in Downing Street,

“To sift and riddle the Nation, so that you might extricate and sift out the true ten gold grains, or ablest men, and of these make your Governors or Public Officers; leaving the dross and common sandy or silty material safely aside, as the thing to be governed, not to govern; certainly all ballot-boxes, caucuses, Kennington-Common meetings, Parliamentary debatings, Red Republics, Russian Despotisms, and constitutional or unconstitutional methods of society among mankind, are intended to achieve this one end; and some of them, it will be owned, achieve it very ill!”

Carlyle thus stated the job: to find the best intellects to run the country. He follows this by thinking through the practicalities. Someone or some group must be the individuals with the task of selecting the gifted people who will become the governors. They will require a method of selection, bearing in mind that what they are looking for is the brightest intellects. And they will have to decide whom should be tested. From Carlyle, the answers to the first two of these practical issues are unsatisfactory, and the answer to the third is perhaps surprising.

Who should sift and riddle the nation to find the best intellects? Carlyle writes in *Downing Street*, as follows.

“Who is there that can recognize real intellect, and do reverence to it; and discriminate it well from sham intellect, which is so much more abundant, and deserves the reverse of reverence? He that himself has it!--One really human Intellect, invested with command, and charged to reform Downing Street for us, would continually attract real intellect to those regions, and with a divine magnetism search it out from the modest corners where it lies hid. And every new accession of intellect to Downing Street would bring to it benefit only, and would increase such divine attraction in it, the parent of all benefit there and elsewhere!”

To those who are familiar with Carlyle’s fondness for strong, charismatic leaders and his biographies of Cromwell and Frederick the Great, this will not be surprising. But the answer begs the question of the method to be used to find such a person in the first place.

Carlyle then turns to the question of how others shall be tested for their ability to govern. In *Downing Street* he asks about the possible method of such testing.

‘What method, then; by what method?’ ask many. Method, alas! To secure an increased supply of Human Intellect to Downing Street, there will evidently be no quite effectual ‘method’ but that of increasing the supply of Human Intellect, otherwise definable as Human Worth, in Society generally; increasing the supply of sacred reverence for it, of loyalty to it, and of life-and-death desire and pursuit of it, among all classes,--if we but knew such a ‘method’! Alas, that were simply the method of making all classes Servants of Heaven; and except it be devout prayer to Heaven, I have never heard of any method!”

It was mentioned above that the Chinese had had in place a system of sifting the nation for its civil service. It was based on intellect, and had been running for many hundreds of years. Perhaps Carlyle had not heard of it, or would not have considered it suitable to find the particular type of intellect he thought was appropriate for governing. Therefore, for two of Carlyle’s issues we have had unsatisfactory answers. He has strong opinions that a key leader is needed in order to attract and seek others, but it is not clear how such a person will emerge; and he declares himself ignorant of any method by which people can be tested for their relevant abilities.

Thomson and Carlyle might have had different ideas about the people who would be allowed to participate in society’s decision making. We have no evidence to indicate that Thomson was other than a democrat. However, they agree that the search for intellectual talent is an important task for society. Thomson was closely

associated with the use of mental ability tests (also called intelligence tests, IQ tests, cognitive ability tests, etc.) for this purpose. Thomson was realistic. He might have been involved in the production and distribution of such tests on a huge scale, but he was critical about their powers.

“I have had for thirty years a very wide experience of making, using, and following up the results of group tests. Few can be more fully aware of their dangers and pitfalls than I am. They are, of course, like all human instruments, far from infallible: but they are less fallible than most other methods of estimating human ability—at any rate, at estimating ability in a comparatively short time, as is often necessary. We must not make the better the enemy of the good. It is a common error of judgment to say (as one can of most things) “this is not perfect”, and then to add “so away with it”. Of course group intelligence tests are not perfect. But in the absence of any better alternative at present, we must use the group tests and their correlations with the numerous social facts we have collected, while bearing in mind throughout the very many limitations to which these tests are subject.” (Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1949, pp. xiv–xv.)

When Carlyle turns to the question of where talent should be sought, the answer is clearly meritocratic, and in one sense democratic. He cares nothing for background; he simply wants the best talent for the country, wherever it is found. And here he shows some sophistication with regard to population statistics. That is, he realises that, the more people who are considered, the more likely one is to find high intellect. In *Downing Street*, he writes as follows.

“Consider how many Toms and Jacks there are to choose from, well or ill! The aristocratic class from whom Members of Parliament can be elected extends only to certain thousands; from these you are to choose your Secretary, if a seat in Parliament is the primary condition. But the general population is of Twenty-seven Millions... the whole British Nation, learned, unlearned, professional, practical, speculative and miscellaneous, is at your disposal! “In the lowest broad strata of the population, equally as in the highest and narrowest, are produced men of every kind of genius; man for man, your chance of genius is as good among the millions as among the units;—and class for class, what must it be! From all classes, not from certain hundreds now but from several millions, whatsoever man the gods had gifted with intellect and nobleness, and power to help his country, could be chosen:”

It is worth emphasizing the following from the above quotation: “In the lowest broad strata of the population, equally as in the highest and narrowest, are produced men of every kind of genius...” That is an especially meritocratic—and modern-sounding—thought. Of course, it could reflect his personal background,

given his own social mobility. Both he and Thomson rose to high social status from humble backgrounds as a result of the sifting processes based on intelligence. And, like Thomson, Carlyle would have thought about what would have happened with his life had he not been elevated as a result of his mental capability. Certainly, Carlyle considered those of high ability whose eventual occupation did not fully reflect what they might have done. In *Downing Street* he wrote as follows.

“From the lowest and broadest stratum of Society, where the births are by the million, there was born, almost in our own memory, a Robert Burns; son of one who “had not capital for his poor moor-farm of Twenty Pounds a year.” Robert Burns never had the smallest chance to get into Parliament, much as Robert Burns deserved, for all our sakes, to have been found there. For the man... was a born king of men: full of valor, of intelligence and heroic nobleness; fit for far other work than to break his heart among poor mean mortals, gauging beer!” “Song-writing,--the narrowest chink ever offered to a Thunder-god before!”

Carlyle, again in *Downing Street* presses home the thought that his proposal is a kind of democracy, even though it is not the democracy that others typically mean when they use the term.

“For the sake of my Democratic friends, one other observation. Is not this Proposal the very essence of whatever truth there is in “Democracy;” this, that the able man be chosen, in whatever rank he is found? That he be searched for as hidden treasure is; be trained, supervised, set to the work which he alone is fit for. All Democracy lies in this...”

“By what method or methods can the able men from every rank of life be gathered, as diamond-grains from the general mass of sand”

“to choose the fittest man, under penalties; to choose, not the fittest of the four or the three men that were in Parliament, but the fittest from the whole Twenty-seven Millions that he could hear of”

Carlyle presses home the validity of his democratic proposal by citing an example of an organization that follows his precepts: the Roman Catholic Church. This is an especially good example, given that the organization is old, strictly hierarchical and conservative.

“To promote men of talent, to search and sift the whole society in every class for men of talent, and joyfully promote them, has not always been found impossible. In many forms of polity they have done it, and still do it, to a certain degree. The degree to which they succeed in doing it marks, as I have said, with very great accuracy the degree of divine and human worth that is in them, the degree of success or real ultimate victory they can expect to have in this world.--Think, for example, of the old Catholic Church... No questions asked about your birth, genealogy, quantity of

money-capital or the like; the one question was, “Is there some human nobleness in you, or is there not?” The poor neat-herd’s son, if he were a Noble of Nature, might rise to Priesthood, to High-priesthood, to the top of this world...”

A century later, one can see Carlyle’s sifting system in the UK: through mental testing for the purposes of different levels of secondary education. At the Carnegie-funded International Conference on Examinations in 1931, the UK system was described as follows,

“If you want to see the educational process as it is conceived by the ordinary English administrator, choose an early train going through a rather thinly populated district in England and stopping at all the country stations. At each of the little country stations, round about eight o’clock, or half past eight in the morning, you will see about four or five pupils, perhaps two girls and three boys, and if the village is somewhat larger, it may be four girls and six or seven boys, waiting to be picked up by the train to go to a central secondary school. They have all been chosen by examinations—one hopes to heaven that the examinations do choose them with some actual success in getting the best of them. It is to them, by trying to discover every naturally superior mind, and not only give it its opportunity to force its way to the front but actually train it and bring it to the front, that the English administrator at this moment mainly trusts in his hopes for the future of our civilization.” (Wallas, in Monroe, 1931).

Wallas’s final sentence has much resonance with Carlyle’s concerns: “trying to discover every naturally superior mind... for the future of our civilization”.

Thomson wanted to apply this type of sieving for different reasons. Whereas Carlyle focused on finding an intellectual and moral elite to run the country, Thomson’s aims were the common and individual good. The educational sieve was to be applied for the purpose of meritocratic selection, and the achievement of an educated society. In his Mond lecture he stated that one of the aims of participating in the science of intelligence testing was, “a desire to give the individual poor boy a chance of getting on in the world” (Thomson, 1936, 1937). Seventeen years later, in another lecture (Thomson, 1953), he said that his three passions in professional life were educational research, “to know more and more about the world of mathematics” and, “the feeling that I had a moral duty to do everything possible to improve methods of discovering intelligent children who might be overlooked, and guiding them into forms of higher education likely both to make them happier in their lot, and useful to a society and civilisation which needs them.”

Possibly, this is a place of clear divergence between Thomson and Carlyle, as it was between Thomson and some of his contemporaries. At the time—the UK

in the 1920s and early 1936—when educational opportunities were expanding there was a concern that an over-educated population without the appropriate opportunities to use the education in occupations that required it could become disaffected. Thomson (1936, 1937) tackled this directly in his Mond Lecture, “how many educated intelligences does a modern community need? Now for my own part I reply to this without hesitation with the answer, as many as it can possibly get.” Thomson did not want to see a “split in the nation between the educated and the uneducated, which means, if not civil war, then a state of disguised warfare.” This is an almost identical concern to that of Herrnstein and Murray (1994) in their bestselling book *The Bell Curve*, in which they described a USA split on the basis of education and mental ability.

Despite Thomson’s huge professional commitment to the devising and distributing of mental tests for educational selection, he did not agree with the system which the testing supported, “I regret the forking of the ways in England, at the early age of 11 years, into elementary and secondary education, and why I prefer the American system of one High School for all” (Thomson, 1936, 1937). And he continued by indicating that, although some mechanism of intellectual testing was needed to identify the correct level of education for each individual, that did not imply that people should be separated on this basis.

“I not only think that every sufficiently intelligent child is entitled to a higher education, but I think it would be in its own interest for the State to strain every nerve to see that he got it, and got it if possible in a way which would not create social differences based on intelligence, in the same school as his less intelligent comrade.”

Conclusion

Thomson’s Mond lecture ended with a homily on the importance of intelligence, of appreciating differences in people’s intelligence, and of educating them according to such differences.

“The only hope for unity, permanent unity, among mankind is through the rule of intelligence, through the cultivation, by an education proper to each, of the intelligence of all. The schoolmaster is right who considers that his sole business is to lead his pupils to see truth clearly, and who holds that this is in itself character training, character training, and the only character-training the school may lend itself to, if it is to refrain from serving party or class, colour or race, or prejudice of whatever kind, but is to serve civilisation and all mankind.”

For Thomson, like Carlyle before him, the stakes were high. Thomson was writing against a background of the rise of “irrationalism”—as he called it—in Europe. And he thought his work on intelligence had a place in fighting the forces of irrationalism. Thomson and Carlyle had, therefore, both enlisted the testing of

intelligence and the identification of people of high intelligence—from all social levels—into the front line in their plans to retain civilisation.

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SYLLABUS 2009-10



CARLYLE SOCIETY: PROGRAMME FOR 2009-10

October 31	Mary Hollern: the new Carlyle Society
November 21	Aileen Christianson Jane Welsh Carlyle: between life, letters and reminiscences and AGM
December 5	David Purdie: Getting at the truth about Burns
February 6	Malcolm Ingram: Jane Carlyle: Her 'Mads' and Mad Doctors
February 27	Maurice Milne: 'Gang warily': Carlyle and Henry Drummond
March 13	David Sorensen: New Carlyle Letters discovered

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