

**THE  
CARLYLE SOCIETY**

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## **President's Letter**

2013-14 will be a year of changes for the Carlyle Society of Edinburgh. Those of you who receive notification of meetings by email will already have had the news that, after many years, we are leaving 11 Buccleuch Place. We have enjoyed the hospitality of Lifelong Learning for decades but they, too, are moving. So we are meeting – for this year – in the seminar room on the first floor of 18 Buccleuch Place. There is one flight of stairs (I used it for decades! It's not bad) and we will be comfortably housed there. Usual time.

The Carlyle Letters are moving steadily towards the completion of the correspondence of Thomas and Jane; with Jane's death in 1866 we will have published all the known letters between them, and we plan to tidy off the process with some papers from the months immediately following her death, and papers more recently come to light, namely volumes 43-44. The Carlyle Letters Online are also moving steadily to catch up with the published volumes. Volume 40 was celebrated with a public lecture in Autumn 2012; volume 41 will appear in printed form in about a month's time, and the materials for volume 42 will be going to Duke in about a week's time from when these words are written.

We are grateful to the English Literature department for access to our new premises in 18 Buccleuch Place; to Andy Laycock of the University's printing department for Herculean efforts with our annual papers; to those members who now accept their annual mailing in electronic form, a huge saving in time and money. Many members of the society help in many ways and to all, thank you.

Ian Campbell  
President

Edinburgh, 16 August 2013

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# CARLYLESE

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## Introduction

For present-day readers, Carlyle's style presents a barrier. It seems mannered, full of dated allusions, and steeped in Biblical language and scriptural references ill-understood today. His use of German constructions is off-putting, and his whole manner, sometimes hectoring and dogmatic, sometimes wild and extravagant, is an obstacle to the novice reader. Carlylese, as his style was early labelled (1858 is given as its first appearance by the Oxford English Dictionary) was quickly parodied and copied. His methods of achieving his effects have been much studied since *Sartor Resartus* and *French Revolution* were first published. G.B.Tennyson (1965), in his examination of *Sartor*, remarks that 'not until Joyce is there a comparable inventiveness in English prose'. There is a huge existing literature on the subject, reviewed in detail by Tennyson (1973), and since then computers have made text analysis simple and speedy. The Oxford English Dictionary Online now supplies detailed statistics about its sources, allowing all Carlyle's innovations to be found and dated, but little attempt has been made to see how many of his coinages survive in current everyday use.

Such analysis makes up the 'how' of Carlylese: its nuts and bolts. Despite repeated examination of Carlyle's style few have explored why he chose to devise it. Why would a writer neglect his primary duty to communicate clearly with his reader? The same question can be asked about the even more obscure style of Joyce in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, and this paper compares and contrasts the two men and their styles in an attempt to answer it.

## Carlylese

Carlyle's style is not just a present day problem, related to the passage of time. Sterling, a close friend, wrote to Carlyle in 1835, after *Sartor* appeared. He called his style 'headlong, self-asserting and capricious,' his language 'barbarous', and illustrated it by citing three words - 'environment', 'stertorous,' and 'visualised'-

all now current and widely used. Sterling also recognised its merits: ‘It certainly gives force and emphasis and often serves to point the meaning.’ His main criticism, which holds true today, is this: ‘But a style may be fatiguing precisely by being too emphatic, forcible and pointed; and so straining the attention to find its meaning, or the admiration to appreciate its beauty.’

Carlyle was well aware of the problems his style caused. He defended his methods vigorously when he replied to Sterling, claimed that he was only mirroring the language changes going on at this time, and continued:

‘Your objections to phraseology and style have good grounds to stand on; many of them indeed are considerations to which I myself was not blind. . . . If one has thoughts not hitherto uttered in English books, I see nothing for it but you must use words not found there, must make words, with moderation and discretion of course.’ (TC to John Sterling, 4th June, 1835)

And Thackeray, reviewing *French Revolution* for the *Times* on its first appearance in 1837, was also critical:

‘Never did a man’s style so mar his subject and dim his genius. It is stiff, short, rugged, it abounds with Germanisms and Latinisms, strange epithets, and choking double words. Yet, with perseverance, understanding follows, and things perceived first as faults are seen to be part of his originality, and powerful innovations in English prose.’ (Siegel, 1971)

Thoreau claimed that his style stemmed from earlier seventeenth century models:

‘If you would know where many of these obnoxious Carlyleisms and Germanisms come from, read the best of Milton’s prose, read the speeches of Cromwell. . . . For fluency and skill in the use of the English tongue, he is a master unrivalled.’ (Thoreau, 1847).

Carlylese is seen in its fully developed form in *Sartor* and *The French Revolution*, short examples of which are given below. In his early essays he wrote plainer, almost 18th century prose (Roellinger, 1957), and throughout his life his voluminous correspondence, especially to his wife and family, shows that he was capable of straightforward, unadorned writing. The style is the man, and many remarked during his lifetime that his writings bore a close resemblance to his conversation and to his public lectures.

## **Prophetic discourse**

John Holloway's *The Victorian Sage* (1953) gave a detailed and convincing analysis of the methods and language of sages of the period, including, besides Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Newman, George Eliot, Disraeli, and Thomas Hardy. He showed that their styles have features in common, that the sage's task involves modifying the reader's perception, and that this is accomplished by artistry with words. The sage does not rely on logical argument, but appeals more to the imagination, expressing ideas concretely with specific examples, and using much figurative language. Holloway illustrated this convincingly in Carlyle's case, asserting that 'Carlyle's wild imagery and distorted meanings are less irresponsible than they seem at first reading.' He pointed out Carlyle's constant dogmatism, his certainty about having answers, his arbitrary and unproved assertions, and the constant uncertainty about meaning, especially in *Sartor*. As J. S. Mill pointed out, Carlyle's calls for action, not thought, were emotional and anti-intellectual. 'Carlyle never set out premises and reasoned his way to conclusions, but habitually dealt in intuitions and dogmatic assertions' (Mill, *Autobiography*, 1873).

## **Metaphor**

'*Metaphorical talent ... is the first characteristic of genius.*' Carlyle, *Notebooks*, 1822. (Norton, 1898)

'*Prodigious influence of metaphors! Never saw it until lately!*' Carlyle, *Journal*, 1829. (Froude, 1882)

Carlyle used metaphor extensively and extendedly as one of his main literary devices. Fire, the fiery furnace, and the Phoenix rising from the ashes were favourites, as were metaphors of water and nature. He had a fondness for medical and anatomical metaphors, and they are found throughout his writing career. In *Characteristics* (1831) he compared the social system to the human body, and disease metaphors abound in *Past and Present* (1843). They include 'foul elephantine leprosy', 'social gangrene', 'paralysis of industry', 'social malady', and more extended metaphors such as: 'Fatal paralysis spreads inwards, from the extremities, in St Ives workhouses, in Stockport cellars, through all limbs, as if towards the heart itself'. He was also over-fond of bowel metaphors. Writing of the eighteenth century in his *Essay on Scott*, 1838, he describes it as: 'the sickliest of recorded ages, when British Literature lay all puking and sprawling in Wertherism, Byronism, and other Sentimentalism tearful or spasmodic (fruit of internal wind).' And in his journal many years later, while writing Frederick: '...

the problem is to burn away the immense dung heap of the eighteenth century.’

*Sartor Resartus* is one long metaphor: a clothes philosophy; and the clothes metaphor is applied to every area of human life, at length, and with great humour and ingenuity.

### Elements of Style

Carlyle’s style is cumulative and does not lend itself to short extracts, but two passages will illustrate many of its elements: a paragraph from *Sartor Resartus* and another from *The French Revolution*:

‘For long years,’ writes Teufelsdröckh, ‘had the poor Hebrew, in this Egypt of an Auscultatorship, painfully toiled, baking bricks without stubble, before ever the question once struck him with entire force: For What? - Beym Himmel! For Food and Warmth! And are Food and Warmth nowhere else, in the whole wide Universe, discoverable? - Come of it what might, I resolved to try.’ *Sartor Resartus, Book 2, Chap.5, p 103.*

‘Ye have roused her, then, ye Emigrants and Despots of the world; France is roused! Long have ye been lecturing and tutoring this poor Nation, like cruel uncalled-for pedagogues, shaking over her your ferulas of fire and steel: it is long that ye have pricked and filliped and affrighted her, there as she sat helpless in her dead cerements of a Constitution, you gathering in on her from all lands, with your armaments and plots, your invading and truculent bullyings; - and lo now, ye have pricked her to the quick, and she is up, and her blood is up, the dead cerements are rent into cobwebs, and she fronts you in that terrible strength of Nature, which no man has measured, which goes down to Madness and Tophet: see now how ye will deal with her.’ *French Revolution, Part3, Bk1, Chap1, p123.*

Carlyle’s prose is instantly identifiable by a number of characteristics. They include:

**Germanisms.** He often uses German words- Beym Himmel for By Heaven - and is fond of the German habit of forming **compound or portmanteau words**, joining two words with or without hyphens, e.g. Teufelsdröck

**Capitalisation.** Nouns are often headed by capital letters in the German style, but not consistently, and Carlyle uses capitals for emphasis. He also uses italics and underlinings freely.

**Unusual word order**, again influenced by German, especially reversal of the conventional order, e.g. ‘Unspeakably touching is it, however...’



**Short sentences**, sometimes with no verb. e.g. ‘For Food and Warmth!’

**Unusual or archaic words** e.g. ‘ferula’, and ‘filliped’ - flicked with the finger.

**Biblical style and diction.** The influence of the Authorised Version and of the Scottish Psalter is everywhere, e.g. the use of ‘ye’ above, the reference to Tophet (the shrine of Moloch and human sacrifice near Jerusalem), and the Biblical echoes of ‘pricks’, ‘lo now’, ‘baking bricks without stubble’, and others.

Extensive use of **expression marks** and much use of **punctuation**.

**Historical present tense.** Especially in his historical writing Carlyle does not use the past tense to describe past events but writes as though he is part of them in the present, like a journalist commenting on live action.

**Imperative tense and Apostrophe.** Either the reader or a character in the book is frequently addressed directly, and may be treated as a friend, preached at as a member of the congregation, or harangued as an idiot. Above, ‘Emigrants and Despots’ are apostrophised and told ‘see now how ye will deal with her’. The reader of the lengthy and often complicated *Frederick* is frequently addressed with the command: ‘Courage!’ Often the reader is questioned.

**Neologisms.** He introduced many new words and phrases to the language, and frequently redefined common words, using them in a new special sense.

**Metaphors** are frequent, unusual and extended, and once used may be taken up again many chapters later.

**Personification.** Above, France is personified as a woman lying dead in funeral attire who is roused to life again.

**Repetition.** For emphasis. e.g. ‘Ye have roused her.....’ ‘France is roused.’

Many of these devices come originally from classical rhetoric. The word most often used by critics over the years to describe his style is ‘wildness’, and other words often used to describe the overall effect of his prose include: exhilaration, amusement, fatigue, resentment, and feelings of being either converted or bullied.

### **Coinages: Carlyle in the Oxford English Dictionary.**

The O.E.D. is now available online and instead of relying on slips of paper contributed by many volunteers, its editors are now able to search the vast digital databases that have become available for current and past publications, and for the dictionary itself.. A section called Sources gives the first thousand main sources of the quotations used to illustrate a word’s usage (OED online, 2012). These sources

may be individual authors or other sources such as the *Times* newspaper. The dictionary gives figures for each source, dividing them into three main categories. The first is the total number of quotations from that author used in the dictionary as examples; the second the number of quotations that are considered first uses of a word that is a main entry– in other words the author can claim to have used the word first, or to have coined it. The third group is trickier – it is the number of words or phrases that are used by the author for the first time in a particular sense, such as figuratively instead of concretely, or for using a particular noun as a verb for the first time, or coining a phrase made from existing known words. For example Carlyle was not the first user of suicide as a word but is credited with the first use of ‘suicidal’ and ‘suicidally’. Similarly with the word ‘walz’, used figuratively by Carlyle of walzing clouds, to mean moving lightly or nimbly .

Figures are supplied for the sources of Carlyle’s quotations, and unsurprisingly over fifty percent come from his three main works – *Sartor*, *French Revolution*, and *Frederick the Great*. The works written with much less Carlylese, like *Reminiscences* and the *Life of Sterling*, contribute little.

|                                     |      |      |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|
| Total Quotations                    | 6778 | 26th |
| First Quotations                    | 547  | 45th |
| First Quotations in a Special Sense | 1789 | 33rd |

*Table 1- Carlyle Quotations in the O.E.D.*

Table 1 shows both the number of quotations and their rank order in the first thousand sources. For **total** number of quotations Carlyle comes 26th in the first thousand with a total of 6778. For comparison, in total quotations Shakespeare is the first author, Walter Scott second, Chaucer 6th, Milton 7th, and Dickens at 14th leads the Victorians. Carlyle is next, just ahead of Tennyson (27th), and the next Victorian is Thackeray at 46th. For **first** quotations Carlyle comes 45th with a total of 547. Coleridge is ahead of him in 37th place with 640, Scott is at 61th with 471, and Southey in 80th place with 397. These are his only contemporaries in the first hundred entries. Finally, for **‘first in a special sense’** quotations, Carlyle is 33rd with a total of 1789, with Scott ahead in 18th place and 2218 quotations, and Dickens behind in 41st place with 1570 quotations. Carlyle is by

far the leader here among the Victorians. Southey is the only other contemporary in the first hundred.

These sources in the online dictionary give access to complete details of all these quotations under the three headings. From the Carlyle ‘firsts,’ which give all his coinages of completely new words, those thought to be in general use today were selected; partly a subjective decision and partly with reference to computer spell checker recognition: there was little disagreement. This selection of these new words in common use today numbers 81 of the 547, or 15 %.(Appendix 1). Many of these words are surprising in being so commonly used: improvised, decadent, giggly, gullible, shiftiness, unrhymed.

The only frequently used prefixes are dys- and un-. The suffixes-able and -ability occur eighteen times. To take un- as an example, there are 547 first usage words in the OED list, of which 81 begin with un-, which is 13%, or about one in seven. But only ten of the 81 are used at all widely today. They are: unadmiring, uncoverable, undeliverable, undiplomatic, undoable, unenrolled, unfathomability, unpatriotic, unrealizable, and unrhymed; and even several of those are not recognised by a computer spell check. Ten out of 81 gives Carlyle a survival rate of 12 %. Some of the 62 now not in use include: unguillotined, which obviously had a useful place in *French Revolution*; unveracity, which might be useful as a House of Commons euphemism for a lie, and unsalvatory, unworker, unthinker, unsnuffed, unfirmamented and unfeudalize, none of which were destined to survive. There are borderline cases: unattaining, unadoptable, un-German, unpromptly –but other words would now be used to convey the meaning. Carlyle may have had a wider influence here, with this and his other favourite prefixes and suffixes, by encouraging his contemporaries to make coinages, during a century which was a productive one for new words.

The words that do cause a problem are the many -1789 - that are a first use in a particular sense, many of them common words. G. B. Tennyson in his study of Sartor believes that this group –‘the way he makes existing words work for him’ – is a more important aspect of his style than the coinages. Many are compounds or phrases. Examples include using ‘world’- as a prefix in ‘world-famous’; or ‘thuggery’, from the original ‘thug’, which Carlyle coined to describe ‘Glasgow thuggery’ in *Chartism*.

Many of these words and phrases have survived in use. Here is a selection of both the phrases and the words:

At any rate  
Breakfast coffee  
Captain of industry  
Donothingism  
Education secretary  
An open secret  
Self-help  
Shabby-gentility  
Survival of the fittest  
The spoken word  
Ultra-religious  
World-famous  
Clothes-horse  
Care-worn  
Birth-throe  
Bone-idle  
Chit-chatting  
God-ordained  
Lifejourney  
Mammon-worship  
Mine-shaft  
To ride high  
Sheath knife  
Shoulder-high  
Sky-high  
Street-urchin  
Ulsterman  
To wait table  
Wind-bag

*'Special sense' words surviving  
include:*  
Chiaroscuro  
Dualism  
Economics  
Embodiment  
Frenetically  
Genuineness  
Gullible  
Gyrating  
Practicability  
Recognizably  
Rehabilitated  
Roadworthy  
Succinctly  
Suicidal  
Summation  
Technology  
Theatricality  
Tiff  
Thuggery  
Transcendental  
Walz

## Difficulty and Obscurity

The 'why' of Carlylese is a question less often asked. Why did he write like this? Most authors wish to communicate clearly with their readers. Reasons, or excuses, have been proposed, and many influences have been mentioned already. One theory, proposed by Levine (1968), is that Carlyle was a dualist (to use one of his own coinages) and expressed his views in opposites – in black and white terms without shades of grey – and many of his metaphors deal with light and darkness. Levine claimed that Carlyle's dualisms of good and evil, right and wrong, persisted throughout his career, and were evident in many of his aphorisms: 'Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe,' and 'Love not pleasure, love God.' Carlyle was adept at concealing how over-simple these divisions were, and did so by using dramatic metaphors rather than logic. Using coinages beginning with the un-prefix can be seen as another way of making opposites freely.

This, and his lack of reasoned argument, explain why today's historians have little regard for *French Revolution* and *Frederick* as history, despite the immense amount of research that Carlyle carried out. Such writing is deeply unfashionable to the modern historian, who has a much more evidence and logic based approach to the subject. It makes historical writing more boring, and many admit that Carlyle makes for more stimulating reading. Richard Cobb, a distinguished writer of French history, in a letter to Trevor Roper, called Carlyle 'wildly inaccurate,' but said of his writing: 'Imagination, compassion, a sense of place, a sense of colour and of sound, even of night and day, a master of words...he is sensational... Now THAT is GREAT history.' (Heald, 2011)

## Joyce and Carlyle

There may be other, more fundamental reasons for such obscurity. G B Tennyson considered James Joyce to be the greatest and most original stylist since Carlyle (Tennyson, 1965). In many respect they had similar lives and writing careers. Both had intensely religious educations and remained preoccupied with religion during their lives, despite both losing faith. Both wrote a Bildungsroman: *Sartor* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are both autobiographical. Both left the country of their birth in early adult life, and did not return. Both spent many years writing lengthy and difficult final works: *Frederick* took 13 years and *Finnegans Wake* over seventeen. Both have polarised views among critics, and have been accused of wilful obscurity, even by their admirers. Both have at times been

admired and at times rejected by their fellow countrymen. Joyce was banned for many years in Ireland but is now a mainstay of Dublin tourism, while Scotland has moved in the opposite direction, and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, to its shame, has recently put Carlyle's statue into basement storage. Joyce certainly read Carlyle; he wrote one of the best parodies of his style in the Oxen of the Sun chapter in *Ulysses*, and there is a reference to *Sartor* buried in *Finnegans Wake*:

‘And forthemore let legend go lore of it that mortar scene so cwympty dwympty what a dustydust it razed arboriginally but, luck’s leap to the lad at the top of the ladder, so sartor’s resorted why the sinner the badder!’ (Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, p314)

Joyce began as a writer with the beautiful prose of his short stories in *Dubliners*. *Portrait of the Artist* is also clearly written, and it is only in *Ulysses* that his stylistic experiments steadily emerge and become extreme. Few can claim to have read through the 628 pages of *Finnegans Wake*, and both it and *Ulysses* have required commentaries from the time they were first published. Reading *Finnegans Wake*, surrounded with reference books, is interesting, but more akin to solving crossword puzzles than to reading a novel.

There is more serious obscurity in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* than anything in *Sartor* or *French Revolution*. Joyce made no effort to justify or explain his obscurity, boasted that his work would keep academics busy for hundreds of years, and is being proved correct. Carlyle did attempt to justify his style, but like Joyce made no effort to modify it over the years. Both wrote lucid prose in their early years, and in their letters throughout their lives. But with so much in common, why were they obscure in such different ways? When asked, Carlyle pointed to his father's example, which must have been largely Biblical and sermon based, and obviously his wide youthful reading and translation of German authors is important.

Concealment has been put forward as a reason for obscurity in both Joyce and Carlyle. It has been suggested that Joyce tried to conceal the sexual content in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* by making them both long and difficult to read, so that potential censors would be too bored by the books to worry. This is unconvincing. Joyce's *Portrait* and Carlyle's *Sartor* are concerned with loss of religious faith. Carlyle's letters to his mother are an object lesson in how to dissemble, as for many years he conceals from her his loss of belief in many of her religious convictions. Similarly in *Sartor* he does little to help the reader

striving to uncover his basic views of Christianity. The literature about Carlyle and religion is full of contradictory conclusions (see Kerry and Cristler, 2005), and deliberate obscurity on the author's part perhaps explains why it continues to attract scholars (Tennyson, 1973).

Both Joyce and Carlyle seem to take pleasure in creating obscurity, perhaps because both had a good sense of humour and were what might be called tricksters, who enjoyed playing games with their readers. Joyce called *Finnegans Wake* 'The J.J. Safety Pun Factory,' a broad hint that he was using his style to conceal things. Carlyle admits almost openly to tricking the reader in *Sartor*. The so-called editor of the work of Professor Teufelsdröck writes that he suspects he is being made a fool of:

'Here, indeed, at length, must the Editor give utterance to a painful suspicion.... It is a suspicion grounded perhaps on trifles, yet confirmed almost into certainty by the more and more discernible humoristico-satirical tendency of Teufelsdröckh, in whom underground humors and intricate sardonic rogueries, wheel within wheel, defy all reckoning.... Our theory begins to be that, in receiving as literally authentic what was but hieroglyphically so, Heuschrecke, whom in that case we scruple not to name Hofrath Nose-of-Wax, was made a fool of, and set adrift to make fools of others. Could it be expected, indeed, that a man so known for impenetrable reticence as Teufelsdröckh would all at once frankly unlock his private citadel to an English Editor and a German Hofrath; and not rather deceptively inlock both Editor and Hofrath in the labyrinthic tortuosities and covered-ways of said citadel (having enticed them thither), to see, in his half-devilish way, how the fools would look?' (*Sartor*, pp152-3)

The positioning of this passage is significant. It is in Chapter 10, entitled *Pause*, and follows the three chapters that comprise the most serious and autobiographical material of the book: *The Everlasting No*, *Centre of Indifference*, and *The Everlasting Yea*. These are the very sections that describe Carlyle's religious experience and that have been a main part of discussion of Carlyle's views on religion for many years. And here, immediately following them, is a broad hint that games are being played with the reader, and that he may be making fools of us. More straightforwardly, Carlyle wrote in his journal on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1843: "The world has no business with my life; the world will never know my life, if it should write and read a hundred biographies of me. The main facts of it are known, and are likely to be known, to myself alone of created men."

## Family Histories

Dualism, concealment, tricksterism, or mixtures of all three, have been given as possible reasons for employing obscurity. Another and more fundamental one is possible: both these writers had in common a family history of mental illness. Joyce had a schizophrenic daughter, Lucia, who spent most of her adult life in psychiatric hospitals (Schloss, 2003). The thinking processes and the language and writing of schizophrenics bear a strong resemblance to Joyce's style. The psychiatrist C. G. Jung treated Lucia for a short time, and failed to convince her father that she had schizophrenic thought disorder: Joyce claimed he could understand her: "Whatever spark or gift I possess has been transmitted to Lucia and it has kindled a fire in her brain." Jung later described some of the language of *Ulysses* as akin to that of schizophrenics. This was before *Finnegans Wake* was written, in which the resemblances are even stronger. Joyce said that he and Lucia were 'like two people going to the bottom of a river, one falling and the other diving.' (Ellman, 1959). Carlyle's mother had a single but severe attack of mania when Carlyle was a teenager, in which she became elated, disinhibited, over-talkative and violent (Ingram, 2004). Carlyle was not bipolar, but was moody and hypochondriacal. Similarly, Joyce was no schizophrenic, but he was a withdrawn and suspicious man, and a heavy drinker.

Both schizophrenic and manic patients show disturbances of speech and thought, but they differ markedly. The manic patient, who is elated and over talkative, shows 'flight of ideas' and pressure of talk, speaks rapidly and jumps from topic to topic. Usually it is possible to follow the links, often connected by sounds or other random associations. Manic patients can be entertaining to listen to but rapidly become tiresome and fatiguing, because they never stop talking. Schizophrenic thought disorder differs. It shows breaks in the chain of thought, incoherence, words become fused together (*Verschmelzung*) and speech becomes so opaque and personalised that it is impossible to follow or understand. In extreme cases this has been called 'word salad'. Both manic and schizophrenic patients often coin words, schizophrenics by fusion, manic patients by expansion.

These contrasting language disorders mirror the differences between Carlyle's and Joyce's prose. Carlyle expands words with prefixes and suffixes and portmanteau words, and by widening the meaning of common words. His constant and extended metaphors can be compared to flight of ideas, his generally 'wild' style resembles pressure of talk, and, as Sterling pointed out all these years ago, can quickly be fatiguing, although there is rarely any great difficulty in tracing



the meaning. His written style is mirrored in accounts of Carlyle's conversation, which describe his loud laugh, and his flow of speech, talking others down, and setting the table on a roar at dinner parties, despite often talking about the virtues of silence. Joyce contracts rather than expands when forming new words, fusing them together with puns, many of which have a personal meaning for the writer that the reader knows not of. In *Finnegans Wake* there are constant breaks in the chain of thought, resulting in a 'word salad.' The short sentence from *Finnegans Wake* quoted above is sufficient to illustrate this, and is typical and chosen only because it has a Carlyle link. The Carlylese examples given earlier are much easier to follow.

Both authors knew what they were doing, both were touched with genius, and neither showed any signs of mental illness, but there is good reason to think that genetic factors are at work here, as one of the many factors contributing to their divergent styles and obscurity. Genetic factors are important in both bipolar illness and schizophrenia. Not only are there more cases of these disorders in their families, but also an excess of individuals who show personality features associated with the disorders: more moodiness in bipolar relatives, and more withdrawn asocial behaviour in the relatives of schizophrenics. Both Carlyle and Joyce showed such personality features. It is probable that these genetic factors contributed to their writing styles, and in addition explain the differences between them.

### **Conclusions: Nature and Nurture**

Evidence from the Oxford English Dictionary shows what a powerful influence Carlyle wielded in forming new words in his lifetime and how many of them survive and flourish in everyday use over a century and a half later. His style has had less impact. A review reveals the many environmental factors that helped to form it. To these environmental factors, genetic factors may be added. It is accepted that heredity plays a large part in intelligence, and in musical or linguistic ability. It also applies to personality and psychiatric disorders. Carlyle's obscurity was multi-factorial. The environmental factors include: his classical and rigorous education, his childhood exposure to scripture and sermons, and his initial training for the ministry. Add his wide reading of seventeenth and eighteenth century literature, his long exposure to German language and literature, and the time he lived in, when language was changing rapidly all around him. Add also his dualism, his need to conceal his lack of logic, and to befog his religious

beliefs. Finally, add to all this the influence of manic-depressive genes, which not only helps to explain his passion for new words, the wild exuberance both of his prose and of his conversation, but also aspects of his character: his constant appeals for silence and soundproof rooms, his hypochondria and his frequent gloom.

## Appendix 1 -Current Carlylisms

Out of the quotations cited by the OED as providing first evidence of the word, 87 of a total of 547 (16 %) are listed below as in common use today. This is an entirely subjective choice.

|                 |                       |                           |
|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| absent-minded   | dynamism              | recognizably              |
| affordable      | embodiment            | rehabilitated             |
| anecdotal       | engined               | rub-a-dub                 |
| anthropophagous | euphuistic            | sanctioning               |
| approximately   | excerpting            | self-help                 |
| Aristophanic    | finishable            | shiftiness                |
| assertable      | foreshadow            | slouch hat                |
| barricading     | forgettable           | sluggardly                |
| blaming         | frenetically          | smudge – a touch of small |
| blandly         | furnishable           | indication                |
| blubber         | giggly                | tailor-made               |
| Boswellian      | gullible              | theatricality             |
| bridgeable      | hawkish – eg hardline | thuggery                  |
| briskish        | or warlike policies   | unadmiring                |
| capturable      | hireable              | uncoverable               |
| classicist      | hunting dog           | undeliverable             |
| cogitator       | imperturbability      | undiplomatic              |
| completable     | imperturbably         | undoable                  |
| contritely      | improvised            | unenrolled                |
| cosmopolitanism | malodorous            | unfathomability           |
| crossable       | manhunt               | unpatriotic               |
| decadent        | messaging             | unrealizable              |
| deceptiveness   | moon-face             | unrhymed                  |
| deep time       | needling –annoying    | upholstered               |
| discoverability | irritating            | volcanically              |
| dislikable      | partisanship          | Wertherism                |
| displayable     | pretentious           | wrongish                  |

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## **“Leaving Blair’s Lectures Quite Behind”: Thomas Carlyle’s Rhetorical Revolution**

Lowell T. Frye

The Thomas Green Lecture, 2012

The appearance in 2012 of the fortieth volume of the *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* was and is a cause for celebration: forty substantial volumes in forty-two years is a tremendous achievement, one that has transformed scholarly understanding of both Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle. And what better way to mark the significance of the *Collected Letters* than the July 2012 international Carlyle Conference, organized by Aileen Christianson and Ian Campbell at the University of Edinburgh: the three days of reflection and conversation on the Carlyles, on their writings and on their often fraught relationship, demonstrated clearly an intertwining of life and work made available, and in significant measure intelligible, by the Duke-Edinburgh edition.

But the appearance of the fortieth volume of the *Letters* was not the only cause for celebration in 2012: the Carlyle Conference was also part of a year-long program honoring the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the appointment in 1762 of Hugh Blair as the first holder of the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh, an event that may be considered the effective founding of what is now the oldest Department of English Literature in the world. The University of Edinburgh and Hugh Blair fostered the emergence of belletristic rhetoric in the second half of the eighteenth century, and since that time traditional rhetoric, a venerated part of the medieval *trivium*, has slipped into the shadow of what Blair and his contemporaries called *belles lettres* and what we call *literature*, the English-language upstart that had its origin as a subject of university study at the University of Edinburgh. The friction between the study of rhetoric and the study of literature has never entirely dissipated and indeed has generated considerable heat, especially in the United States in the past forty years as rhetoric has experienced something of a revival.

In a small way, I and my spouse, Elizabeth Deis, have played a part in this drama. Educated in nineteenth-century British literature at Duke University, with

an emphasis on Thomas Carlyle and George Meredith respectively, we have spent most of our careers as professors of rhetoric and humanities at Hampden-Sydney College, a small, traditional liberal-arts college in Southside Virginia that can be described with some justice as a grandchild of the University of Edinburgh. Over the years I have devoted much of my scholarly attention to an ongoing study of Thomas Carlyle as a writer who (appropriately enough, given his Annandale roots) tramped the uncertain Borders between “rhetoric” and “literature.” Carlyle himself never could—or would—define exactly what it was he did or wrote—and nor can we, the readers and scholars who have responded to Carlyle’s work and have tried to *fix* it and him during the past 180 years. We are unsuccessful in pigeonholing Carlyle no matter how hard we try. Is he a reviewer? transcendental spiritualist? historian? moral philosopher? political theorist? biographer? social critic? cultural polemicist? Certainly most of us would not call him a novelist or a poet (though Emerson did) or a dramatist or even with full conviction an essayist—and yet to the extent that Carlyle is read these days, such reading takes place most often in departments of *belles lettres*—that is, of English literature—where Scottish Carlyle rubs shoulders a bit uncomfortably with the likes of Byron and Tennyson, Browning and Arnold, the Brontës and Dickens, Gaskell and George Eliot. During his lifetime Carlyle refused all labels, whether political or literary/stylistic, thriving in the interstices between parties and genres. These days we say he wrote “nonfiction,” a bland term that disguises our inability to define just what it is.

Like Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle considered himself a Professor of Things-in-General, even if he never held—nor in truth really wanted—an endowed chair at a reputable university that licensed him to teach.<sup>1</sup> In May 1827 he wrote a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, sounding out the possibility of applying for a post at the newly established University College, London, of which Robinson was an original founder. Much of Carlyle’s encyclopedic mix of competencies, as well as both his self-esteem and his sense of humor, is evident in this letter:

Indeed to myself it seems that some Moral Philosophy or Rhetoric Professorship there would be no such unhandsome appointment. I can teach Mathematics also, and Physics (*Physic*, alas I know *practically!*), and touches of Metaphysics, the oddest mixture of Scotch and German,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 141.

Dugald Stewart and Immanuel Kant! But the *fittest* place for me would be that of ‘Jack of all Trades,’ in case they wanted such a hand.—Seriously, I should like to know. (*Collected Letters* [henceforth *CL*] 4: 225)

In homage to Carlyle as jack of all trades—and in keeping with the multiple occasions celebrated by the Carlyle Conference in July 2012—the remainder of this lecture will be a philosophico-historical excursus that links rhetoric and literature, Hugh Blair and Thomas Carlyle, the University of Edinburgh and Hampden-Sydney College. With luck, it will not turn out to be a *farrago*, a hodge-podge of discordant elements, but if it does, that will perhaps be not entirely amiss, given Carlyle’s attraction not only to mixed genres and conflicting, cacophonous voices but also to the word itself, one he usually modifies with exuberant gusto in his letters: “wretched farrago” (as he called *Sartor Resartus*), “miserable farrago,” “strange farrago,” “stupid farrago,” and my personal favorite, “strange philosophico-gerundgrinder farrago” (*CL* 8:135, 2:327, 7:134, 2:231, 11:63).

The title of this lecture—“Leaving Blair’s *Lectures* Quite Behind”—is a reference to the very first letter Thomas Carlyle wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nine months after a pilgrimage to the wilds of Craigenputtoch to meet the translator of *Wilhelm Meister* and writer of “Characteristics,” Emerson wrote Carlyle in May 1834 to renew the acquaintanceship and to offer frank response to the first four serial installments of *Sartor Resartus*, which Emerson had read in *Fraser’s Magazine*. “Evermore thanks for the brave stand you have made for Spiritualism in these writings,” Emerson applauds, but immediately tempers his praise with sharp words about *Sartor*’s form and style, some of the most incisive and insightful criticism that Carlyle was to receive:

Has literature any parallel to the oddity of the vehicle chosen to convey this treasure? I delight in the contents; the form, which my defective apprehension for a joke makes me not appreciate, I leave to your merry discretion. And yet did ever wise & philanthropic author use so defying a diction? As if society were not sufficiently shy of truth without providing it beforehand with an objection to the form. Can it be that this humor proceeds from a despair of finding a contemporary audience, & so the Prophet feels at liberty to utter his message in droll sounds. . . . [?] Believe then . . . that men are waiting to hear your Epical Song; and so be pleased to skip those excursive involved glees, and give us the simple air, without

the volley of variations. At least in some of your prefaces you should give us the theory of your rhetoric. I comprehend not why you should lavish in that spendthrift style of yours Celestial truths. . . . I look for the hour with impatience when the vehicle will be worthy of the spirit—when the word will be as simple & so as resistless as the thought—& in short when your words will be one with things. I have no hope that you will find suddenly a large audience. . . . Yet all men are *potentially* (as Mr Coleridge would say) . . . your audience & if you will not in very Mephistophelism repel & defy them, shall be actually . . . . (Emerson to Carlyle, 14 May 1834; Slater 98-99)

Concerned that Carlyle may consider him presumptuous, Emerson softens his critique without—quite—recanting it: “I venture to amuse you with this homiletic criticism because it is the sense of uncritical truth seekers . . . whose instincts assure them that there is Wisdom in this grotesque Teutonic apocalyptic strain of yours, but that tis hence hindered in its effect. And though with all my heart I would stand well with my Poet, yet if I offend I shall quietly retreat . . .” (Slater 99-100).

Responding to Emerson in an eloquent letter dated 12 August 1834, Carlyle submits to the younger man’s strictures with surprising mildness, doubtless recalling with gratitude and affection the refreshing gift of Emerson’s unexpected visit the previous summer. “With regard to style and so forth,” Carlyle begins, “what you call your ‘saucy’ objections are not only most intelligible to me, but welcome and instructive” (CL 7:264). Carlyle even concedes the justice of Emerson’s supposition about the lack of an audience: “You say well that I take up that attitude because I have no known public, am *alone* under the Heavens, speaking into friendly or unfriendly Space; add only that I will not defend such attitude, that I call it questionable, tentative, and only the best that I in these mad times could conveniently hit upon” (CL 7: 264). But despite having abjured a defense of his style, Carlyle proceeds to defend it nonetheless, using the reference to “these mad times” to argue the *necessity* of his idiosyncratic style and form:

For you are to know, my view is that now at last we have lived to see all manner of Poeties 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* [my emphasis]; and feels only that there is *nothing sacred*, then, but the *Speech of Man* to believing Men! *This*, come what will, was, is and forever must be *sacred*; and will one day doubtless anew environ itself with fit Modes, with Solemnities that are *not* Mummeries. (CL 7:264)<sup>2</sup>

Carlyle looks to the future for a new rhetoric, a new style, one that harmonizes the needs of the writer and the taste of the reader. But such a style is not possible in the present, according to Carlyle, a fact that even Diogenes Teufelsdröckh does not recognize: “For tho’ Teufelsdröckh exclaims: ‘Pulpit! Canst thou not *make* a pulpit, by simply *inverting the nearest tub*’; yet he does not sufficiently reflect that it is still only a *tub*, that the most inspired utterance will come from *it*, inconceivable, misconceivable to the million; questionable . . . even to the few. Pity us therefore; and with your just shake of the head [—the criticism Emerson has leveled against the form and style of *Sartor*—] join a sympathetic even a hopeful smile” (CL 7:265). Emerson had asked for the theory of Carlyle’s rhetoric, and in this letter he received at least the glimmering of one.

That Carlyle in 1834 should have left Blair’s three volumes of *Lectures*—to say nothing of his five volumes of *Sermons*—quite behind does not surprise us in the twenty-first century because we know the full trajectory of Carlyle’s career as man of letters. But in the mid-1830s, as Carlyle struggled to make a name and build an audience for himself, even sympathetic friends like John Stuart Mill and John Sterling questioned what seemed to them Carlyle’s self-defeating stubbornness in writing prose that outraged accepted notions of appropriate style and drove away far more readers than it enticed. But Carlyle was intransigent, consigning Blair’s *Lectures* to the dustbin of history, along with cardboard theatrical scenery and the outmoded classical unities of action, place, and time. Carlyle intended nothing less than a revolution in *style* to accompany the conceptual and experiential revolution in *fact* that had been announced by the French Revolution.

Carlyle no less than Emerson wanted words and things to coincide, but new things demanded new words, new names: unlike Emerson and Mill and Sterling, Carlyle in the 1830s believed fervently that for words to match the new amazing things pulsing in the Chaos of Being that environs us all, language and style

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<sup>2</sup> Crawford also quotes from this letter in *Devolving English Literature*, p. 140.

themselves must change. As he was later to note in the third volume of his *French Revolution*, struggling to find words to describe the Terror, “all human Speech and Reason . . . [must] strive to *name* the new Things it sees of Nature’s producing,—often helplessly enough. . . . Any approximation to the right Name has value: were the right Name itself once here, the Thing is known henceforth; the Thing is then ours, and can be dealt with” (*Works* 3:204). Given the necessity of proper *naming* as a condition for *understanding*, Carlyle believed that to cling to Hugh Blair’s eighteenth-century *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* after the social, political, and philosophical cataclysm of the French Revolution was an exercise in futility.

To see more clearly why Carlyle felt he must jettison Blair’s *Lectures*, let us put to the side for a moment Blair’s specific advice about the cultivation of taste and the principles of style so as to consider first the cultural project of which his *Lectures* were only a part, though perhaps the decisive and most influential part. Recent scholars such as Robert Crawford, Ian Duncan, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, Thomas P. Miller, and Olivia Smith have shown us that Hugh Blair and his Scottish contemporaries in the mid-eighteenth century transformed the classical rhetoric they had inherited—with its emphasis on *oral* persuasion, the five canons, the mastery of Greek and Latin, and the imitation of Ciceronian adornments and elaborations—into a “new rhetoric,” a primarily *written* form suited for a modern civil society and its holiest of holies, the marketplace. Following the lead of John Stevenson, his own Edinburgh instructor in the 1730s, as well as the lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres that Adam Smith delivered at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1740s, Hugh Blair began in the late 1750s to lecture—in English—on rhetoric and style. The goal—sometimes explicit, more often implicit—was to help upwardly mobile, ambitious young Scots to master the language of power and influence and thus to open the door to success in a United Kingdom where most roads led to London. Acknowledging a debt to Smith in particular, Blair delivered lectures filled with advice distilled from a detailed examination of contemporary, urbane English prose—the essays of Addison and Steele in particular—with the dual goal of helping his students learn to recognize and appreciate the “best” English style and then to imitate such excellence, for only then, Blair believed, would they be taken seriously in the wider world south of the Scottish border.

Olivia Smith has argued that “civilization [in the second half of the

eighteenth century] was largely a linguistic concept, establishing a tension in which vocabulary and syntax distinguished the refined and civilized from the vulgar and savage” (*Politics of Language* vii; qtd. in Crawford 18). As a result, according to Robert Crawford, in Scotland the general eighteenth-century concern with linguistic propriety was particularly intense because it was bound up with a conflict between the urge to treasure the language [and culture] of Lowland Scotland—Scots— . . . and a contrary impulse to develop a Scotland which would take complete advantage of the 1707 Act of Union by playing its part in the newly united political entity of Britain. (*Devolving English Literature* 18)

According to a brutal calculus, if London was the center of British power—commercial, legal, and political—and if the English of Addison and Steele was the language wielded by those who exercised that power, then the Scots must learn to out-English the English if they were to move from the periphery to the center. Put that way, it is hard for us not to deplore as a form of cultural imperialism the pedagogical, “civilizing” process that Blair was engaged in, but as Crawford reminds us, Scots themselves initiated the process and willingly embraced English linguistic norms as a way of getting on in the world (38). Still, there was a steep price to be paid, as people and communities at the periphery, willingly or unwillingly, relinquished the language and customs that up until then had defined them in order to become part of the dominant culture.<sup>3</sup> Nor was the process of assimilation an easy one practically or emotionally. Thomas Miller reminds us that even educated Scots in the eighteenth century “were driven by fears of uttering Scotticisms—the idioms that distinguished their speech from English. Like other literati, [James] Beattie painstakingly imitated the proprieties of Addison and other English essayists” (Miller 155), but fear of linguistic errors kept him on edge. A letter Beattie wrote in 1778 gives voice to the pervasive linguistic anxiety, as Miller notes: “We who live in Scotland,” laments Beattie,

are obliged to study English from books, like a dead language . . . We are slaves to the language we write, and are continually afraid of committing gross blunders; and when an easy, familiar, idiomatical phrase occurs, dare not adopt it, if we recollect no authority for fear of Scotticisms. In a

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<sup>3</sup> One can say that an examination of that steep cultural price—and the mingled loss and gain it that followed in its wake—is the subject of Walter Scott’s great Scottish novels—*Waverley*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, and *Redgauntlet* in particular.

word, we handle English, as a person who cannot fence handles a sword; continually afraid of hurting ourselves with it, or letting it fall, or making some awkward motion that shall betray our ignorance.

(Forbes, *Life and Writing of Beattie* 2:163-164; qtd. in Miller 155)

Though Blair's *Lectures* promoted the possibility and desirability of transformative *individual* change—you too can cultivate good taste! you too can learn to write like Addison and Steele, or at least to recognize and appreciate their excellence!—that same change among the Scots as a whole in the years after 1745 was sufficiently gradual that it did not threaten and indeed bolstered the social structure of the Union. Those who listened in person to Blair's lectures as he delivered them between 1759 and 1783, like those who purchased or borrowed the *Lectures* once they were published—in two volumes totaling more than one thousand pages in 1783, or in three volumes in the expanded and corrected edition of 1785, or in one of the many abridgments that appeared through the first half of the nineteenth century—wanted to climb the social ladder, not destroy it. Given the goals of Blair's rhetoric, it comes as no surprise that Blair belonged to the Moderate Party of the Church of Scotland, willing to accommodate the renewed right of lay patrons to present ministers to the churches—a violation of the terms of the Union of 1707 that provoked a schism in the Church of Scotland. Never a firebrand, Blair adhered to a moderate, enlightened Presbyterian faith neither too hot nor too cold but just right—at least as he saw it (Miller 12; Pittock). The goal of his teaching as of his religion was a tolerant, reasonable, stable civil society, an institution that may very well have seemed fragile to someone who undoubtedly heard about the Jacobite rising of 1715 when he was a small boy and who lived through the rising of 1745 when he was a young man of twenty-seven. His appointment to the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in 1762—like his position at the High Kirk of St. Giles—was therefore at once a recognition of his intellectual abilities and an acknowledgment of the centrality—and political acceptability—of his views.

Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* has never been regarded as highly original. Written for and delivered to his students in Edinburgh for over twenty years before their publication in 1783, the lectures do not so much break new theoretical ground as represent a synthesis of ideas circulating through the Scottish enlightenment, ideas he gathered from Locke and Hume and Smith and Reid, among others, though Blair's detailed analyses of Addison and others have

been praised as landmarks in the history of literary criticism.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the book's very centrism, expressed in an elegant (if to modern ears somewhat stiff and stilted) prose that embodies Blair's chief teachings about written style, resulted in an astounding publishing success at the end of the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century, by which time it had become as much a "climate of opinion" (to borrow Auden's phrase) as a valued compilation of practical advice. (The best analogy in our own time is the phenomenon—in the United States, at least—of William Strunk and E. B. White's *Elements of Style*, a much beloved slim book of stylistic advice that people recommend and cling to even if they pay little attention to its often questionable dicta.) Blair's *Lectures* went through some 130 editions (full or abridged) by the end of the nineteenth century, this despite Leslie Stephen's haughty rebuke in his article on Blair in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1886 that "the lectures expressed the canons of taste of the time in which Addison, Pope, and Swift were recognized as the sole models of English style, and are feeble in thought, though written with a certain elegance of manner" (Stephen 160). What Stephen fails to note is that it is in considerable measure through the influence of Blair's *Lectures* that Addison, Pope, and Swift became widely accepted throughout the English-speaking world as exemplars of the best English style.

Importantly, Blair's book achieved its greatest success and influence among those who inhabited the geographic or socio-economic periphery. For example, Blair's *Lectures* were important to the largely self-taught Chartist activist Thomas Cooper as the chief means by which he sought to acquire "a thorough judgment of style and literary excellence" (Cooper, *Life*, qtd. by Ferreira-Buckley & Halloran xxii). And the book was exceedingly popular in the fledgling United States, as provincial young men (and later, young women, too) sought to master an urbane style that would allow them to make their way in the young republic. Just owning the full version of Blair's *Lectures* in two or three handsome leather-bound volumes became a symbol of one's ambition and taste, however much or little the lectures were actually studied. Blair's influence in North America is not surprising, especially if we consider the large-scale influx to the colonies of Scotch-Irish immigrants (so-called in America, at least) in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. And it is at this juncture that my home institution,

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<sup>4</sup> See Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran's valuable "Introduction" to Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

Hampden-Sydney College, re-enters the story.

Hampden-Sydney College was founded in 1775 in Prince Edward County, Virginia, by a mixed group comprising a handful of Anglican landowners and a larger number of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who had settled in the area beginning in the 1730s.<sup>5</sup> The Prince Edward immigrants were among some 200,000 Presbyterians of Scottish or English descent—many, though by no means all, born in Ulster (hence the term *Scotch-Irish*, widely used in America) and many belonging to the Associate and Reformed churches that had seceded from the Church of Scotland earlier in the eighteenth century—who settled along the frontier in the mid-Atlantic colonies from New York to Georgia. This wave of new arrivals strained beyond capacity the existing supply of reformed ministers who, in keeping with established Presbyterian principle, needed to be educated. Even with a strong preference for ministers educated in the Scottish universities, leading Presbyterians soon saw the desirability of founding colleges and universities in the colonies that could educate ministers closer to their new home. The College of New Jersey—now Princeton University—was chartered in 1746 and began educating ministers who fanned out through the colonies and who served not only as missionaries to Presbyterian communities but also as catalysts to the founding of further colleges and universities.<sup>6</sup>

In 1774 twenty-three-year-old Samuel Stanhope Smith left Princeton as a newly-minted M.A. and Probationer for the ministry and traveled to the piedmont of south-central Virginia to take up missionary work among the Presbyterian

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<sup>5</sup> I am indebted throughout the discussion of the history of Hampden-Sydney College to the magisterial *On This Hill: A Narrative History of Hampden-Sydney College, 1774-1994* (Hampden-Sydney, VA, 1994), written by my former colleague John L. Brinkley, long-time College Historian and Professor of Classics at Hampden-Sydney, who died in September 2012. I am also indebted to the Reverend William E. Thompson, pastor emeritus of College Presbyterian Church, for his discussion of Scots-Irish (or Scotch-Irish) Presbyterian immigrants to the mid-Atlantic American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century and their role in the founding of both Hampden-Sydney College and College Church. See *Her Walls Before Thee Stand: The 235-Year History of the Presbyterian Congregation at Hampden-Sydney, Virginia* (privately printed, 2010), especially Chapter One: “Presbyterian Pioneers in Virginia: 1607-1760,” pp. 13-30, and Chapter Two: “A New College and a Legal Church, 1760-1786,” pp. 33-48. See also Herbert C. Bradshaw, *History of Prince Edward County, from Its Earliest Settlements through Its Establishment in 1754 to Its Bicentennial Year* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1955), pp. 73-76; and David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford U P, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> At the risk of anachronism but for the sake of clarity, I henceforth refer to the “College of New Jersey” as Princeton University.

communities there. He must have impressed those he met, for within months of his arrival, he was selected by the Hanover Presbytery of Virginia to organize the founding of a college in Prince Edward County; in February 1775, he was elected its first rector. Later that spring, Peter Johnston—a merchant born in Annan who had emigrated to Virginia from Edinburgh in 1727—agreed to give the proposed college some ninety-eight acres of land. Smith, meanwhile, returned to Princeton to select a faculty to staff the new college.

Smith was particularly well-positioned for this task, for at Princeton he had studied under John Witherspoon (1723-1794), a native of East Lothian in Scotland who was educated at Haddington Grammar School before becoming Hugh Blair’s classmate at the University of Edinburgh and fellow recipient of the M.A. in 1739. (Like Jane Baillie Welsh, another resident of Haddington, Witherspoon traced his ancestry to John Welsh of Ayr and the daughter of John Knox.) In 1768 Witherspoon emigrated from Scotland to New Jersey and assumed the presidency of Princeton University. Like Blair, Witherspoon had studied under John Stevenson; like Blair, Witherspoon lectured—in English—on rhetoric and belles lettres, English grammar and composition, accomplishing at Princeton something very like what Blair accomplished in Edinburgh. But whereas Blair supported the moderate party of the Church of Scotland and rose to comfortable positions within the established church and the University, Witherspoon became a vocal leader of the evangelical, popular party of the Church opposed to the liberalizing theology of the moderates and their willingness to accommodate government patronage (Miller, *Formation* 12; Craven). And whereas Blair’s *Lectures* fostered the development of taste and criticism as an adjunct to a pleasurable, civilized life—what we might call the rhetoric of aesthetic appreciation—Witherspoon taught a more engaged rhetoric suitable for the new republic that was even then coming into being: it is useful to remember that Witherspoon in 1776 was a signer of the American Declaration of Independence.

When Samuel Stanhope Smith returned to Virginia from Princeton in the fall of 1775, he had found both his faculty—including his younger brother John Blair Smith and a son of John Witherspoon—and a new wife, the daughter of John Witherspoon (Brinkley 11). And the new institution now had a name, yet another “child” of John Witherspoon, according to College historian John Brinkley: *Hampden-Sydney College*, named after John Hampden and Algernon Sidney, seventeenth-century English republican heroes selected as eponyms in a defiant gesture on the brink of the American revolution and perhaps as a not-so-subtle critique of the royally named College of William and Mary in the colonial capital

of Williamsburg.<sup>7</sup> As importantly, Smith returned to Virginia with a curriculum for the new college, one modeled on the “Princeton plan” which was, in fact, itself very much modeled on the curriculum at the University of Edinburgh. As announced in an advertisement that appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in October 1775, “The System of Education [at Hampden-Sydney] will resemble that which is adopted in the College of *New Jersey* [Princeton]; save, that a more particular Attention shall be paid to the Cultivation of the *English* Language than is usually done in Places of Public Education.” Smith assured the public that the new college would labor “to form good men, and good Citizens, on the common and universal Principles of Morality, distinguished from the narrow Tenets which form the Complexion of any Sect” (Brinkley 16-17).

Samuel Stanhope Smith, like his father-in-law Witherspoon, lectured on rhetoric and belles lettres as well as moral philosophy, and the College’s attention to rhetoric continued even after Smith left Hampden-Sydney to return to Princeton in 1779, where in due time he succeeded Witherspoon as president. One might expect that given the mix of family connections and political sentiments, Witherspoon’s rhetorical imprint would have defined the Hampden-Sydney approach. But as Thomas Miller has noted, Witherspoon “was in fact too busy practicing rhetoric to publish on it,” with the result that his *Lectures on Eloquence* did not appear in print until 1801, seven years after his death (*Selected Writings of John Witherspoon* vii). By then, Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* had eclipsed the more activist, politically engaged rhetoric of John Witherspoon and had become an established part of the curriculum at Yale (1785) and Harvard (1788) and other American colleges as well, including Hampden-Sydney. Records show that Blair’s *Lectures* were a featured part of Hampden-Sydney’s revised curriculum in 1819 and again in 1828, but it is likely that the *Lectures* occupied a conspicuous place in the curriculum for at least the first half of the nineteenth century. Its importance can be judged by the fact that Hampden-Sydney’s modest library owns a 1783 Irish edition of Blair’s *Lectures* in three

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<sup>7</sup> The abridged versions in Hampden-Sydney’s library were clearly student classroom texts. One of the abridged texts—its cover inscribed with the name of a future governor of Virginia—is annotated liberally, profusely even, with crescent-shaped ink marks in the margins; I am amused to find that students two hundred years ago were no more discriminating in what they highlighted than they are now! Another of the texts was owned originally by the Union Society, a literary and debating club founded in 1789 that would have had good reason to add Blair’s canonical *Lectures* to its collection. The collections of the Union Society and the Philanthropic Society (1805)—the two eventually merged as the Union-Philanthropic Literary Society—much later became the foundation of the College’s own library.



volumes, as well as three one-volume classroom abridgements published in the United States in 1803, 1805, and 1808.<sup>8</sup>

Given Smith's insistence on the importance of rhetoric in the curriculum at Hampden-Sydney, given the new college's commitment to civic activism in the new republic—to the forming of good men and good citizens—why did Blair's version of rhetoric and belles lettres trump the more civically engaged rhetoric of John Witherspoon, with its emphasis on the classical interrelationship of rhetoric, ethics, and politics (Miller, *Selected Writings* vii)? By the second decade of the nineteenth century—roughly the years when Thomas Carlyle was a student at the University of Edinburgh—the American republic was no longer in its infancy, and post-1815 its survival was no longer in question. Hampden-Sydney students then, like their twenty-first century counterparts now, likely wished to equip themselves so as to rise in the world *as it was* rather than to transform it. The centrist rhetoric of Hugh Blair—especially in the abridged versions of the *Lectures*, which eliminated much of Blair's nuance in favor of stripped-down stylistic advice—served as a practical handbook for upwardly mobile young men seeking to make their mark in commerce and in state and national government.

By the first decades of the nineteenth century, it had become clear in Scotland as in the United States that Blair's rhetoric was especially valued by outsiders wanting to become insiders, or insiders eager to strengthen their position. Many young Scots—like their counterparts across the Atlantic in the young United States—looked to Blair's advice as a way to help them change their spots, to learn an English style that would help them move from the periphery to the center. That, more than anything else, explains Thomas Carlyle's terse dismissal in 1834 of Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. In 1834, as we know, Carlyle did move from the periphery to the center, from Craigenputtoch to London, but the move was to be on *his* terms, not Blair's. No matter where he lived, in Scotland or in England, all his life Carlyle nourished his identity as an *outsider* and repeatedly

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<sup>8</sup> Thompson notes of Brinkley's speculations about the source of the name Hampden-Sydney that "truthfully no one knows for certain how the conjoined names of John Hampden and Algernon Sydney came to be attached to this college and its village. . . . College historian John Brinkley suggested that the college name was perhaps given to Samuel Stanhope Smith by his patriot father-in-law, the Declaration signer, John Witherspoon . . . , but while this is a very logical guess, it is unsubstantiated in provable fact. We do know, however, that John Witherspoon was an ardent admirer of both men" and that there were by then in the American colonies several anti-royalist groups that called themselves "Hampden-Sydney Societies" (43).

refused to do what it might have taken to be an *insider*. Fairly or unfairly, Hugh Blair and his *Lectures* came to represent a vision of the world and of the educated man's orientation to the world that were anathema to Carlyle.

Carlyle always refused to ingratiate himself, but occasionally in the 1820s and 1830s, in his desperation to find a way to make a living, Carlyle considered moving "inside." We have seen already his half-hearted inquiry in 1827 about the possibility of a chair in rhetoric or moral philosophy at University College, London. In January 1834, Carlyle learned from John Gordon, general secretary of the University of Edinburgh, that (as Carlyle reported in a letter to his brother John) "old Rhetoric Andrew is thought to be near his end" (*CL* 7:75)—"old Rhetoric Andrew" being Andrew Brown (1763-1834), holder since 1801 of the Regius Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres that had first belonged to Blair.<sup>9</sup> Brown was the professor of rhetoric at Edinburgh when Carlyle was a student there, though *old Rhetoric Andrew* sounds at least as much dismissive as affectionate. Gordon urged Carlyle to apply for the post, and Carlyle permitted himself to speculate on the possibility: as he wrote to his brother John, "whether I could *now* undertake to have anything to do with Rhetoric, were it offered me; much more whether I shall stir myself to seek it, is a question. The probable answer, No" (*CL* 7:75). In a second letter to John two months later, having in the meantime approached Francis Jeffrey about the possibility of an endorsement—an unlikely prospect, as Jeffrey considered Carlyle's literary doctrines "arrogant, antinational, absurd" (*CL* 7:80)—Carlyle again mentions the Regius Chair, this time with a feigned indifference that does not mask his bitterness toward Jeffrey: "Curiously enough, the Rhetoric Chair at Edinr, just about this time, has fallen vacant [Brown had indeed died]: but I make no whisper of pretention to it; Jeffrey as good as assured me *he* could do nothing for me, beforehand, and we hear and shall likely hear nothing further from him" (*CL* 7: 120). In any event, the possibility of the Regius Chair came to nothing, and George Moir was appointed successor to Andrew Brown. When Moir relinquished the post in 1840, John Gordon approached Carlyle once again to gauge his interest, and this time Carlyle was unequivocal: as he remarks in a letter, again to brother John, "Gordon, the

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<sup>9</sup> The chair came to Brown only because Walter Scott turned it down. According to the preface to the Catalogue of Brown's papers held at the University of Edinburgh, Brown's appointment "proved to be a disaster, however, because he was more interested in North American history than in literature and during his term of office the subject he was appointed to teach declined. He made no literary contribution and as a lecturer he was uninspired."

goose, invited me some time ago to become candidate for the ‘Rhetoric Chair’ in Edinr, vacant by Moir’s resignation. I answered, *Ganz und gar nein* [Completely and absolutely no]” (CL 12:293). By that time Carlyle appears finally to have come to grips with what he had written in 1831: “Providence seems saying to me: Thou wilt never find Pulpit, were it but a Rhetoric chair, provided for thee: invert thy Tub, and speak, if thou have aught to say!” (CL 5:245)—the same tub, one supposes, whose reality the letter to Emerson had called into question!

Still, the repeated musings about a “Rhetoric Chair” underline the fact that in the 1820s and 1830s, Carlyle was thinking about rhetoric and style, and he could hardly have done so without thoughts of Hugh Blair cropping up. Despite his later rejection of Blair’s *Lectures*, the young Carlyle was for a time quite interested in—and respectful of—the book. As early as February 1815 the nineteen-year-old Carlyle, by now teaching at Annan Academy, commissioned university friend Thomas Murray to purchase him a copy of Blair’s *Lectures*; thanking Murray some months later after receiving the copy, Carlyle noted that “‘Blair’ is an excellent peice [*sic*]—and very cheap” (CL 1:39; 1:56). In fact, Carlyle’s early letters—especially those appearing in Volume One of the Duke-Edinburgh edition—reveal a young writer experimenting with a voice and style very much in the mode Blair advocated. For example, in a letter of 1820 to his brother Alick, who lacked the formal education older brother Tom had been provided, Carlyle praises—sincerely, lovingly, but with just a hint of condescension—Alick’s developing prose style:

I recollect last year the marked improvement which I used to notice in your composition and penmanship, but I confess I was not prepared for so elegant and forcible a style as your present epistle manifests. I say elegant and forcible for those epithets are without flattery applicable to it: you have only to persevere in correcting some few—and they are now very few—blemishes of orthography, the result of early inattention—to treasure up the ideas that occur in your reading or intercourse with men, and to express those ideas with the liveliness natural to you, in order to become a *good* letter-writer emphatically so called. (CL 1:291)

I venture to say that few of us readers and scholars of Carlyle, if we were to encounter this letter without any contextual markers, would recognize the prose as Carlyle’s: the stiff formality, the Latinate diction, the syntactic caution suggest not only a young man modeling for his “student” the features of a proper prose style, but a young man who has not yet discovered—or been forced to invent—his own

voice and style. In 1820 Carlyle had not yet left Blair's *Lectures* behind.

That was to change, of course, in the crucial years of the 1820s and early 1830s, during which Carlyle came to understand the sort of man he was, and the sort of writer he would be. He could not be Hugh Blair, nor could he write as Blair counseled. In the "Introduction" to the *Lectures*, Blair links the progress of a nation with the progress of its use of language: "as society improves and flourishes, men acquire more influence over one another by means of reasoning and discourse; and in proportion as that influence is felt to enlarge, it must follow, as a natural consequence, that they will bestow more care upon the methods of expressing their conceptions with propriety and eloquence" (3). "Knowledge and science," Blair continues, "must furnish the materials that form the body and substance of any valuable composition. Rhetoric serves to add the polish; and we know that none but firm and solid bodies can be polished well" (4). Note here the reduction of rhetoric, the classical art of persuasion, to an aesthetic effect of style. Blair recognizes that rhetorical training is in itself not sufficient to produce a fine orator or writer,

but at the same time, though rules and instructions cannot do all that is requisite, they may, however, do much that is of real use. They cannot, it is true, inspire genius; but they can direct and assist it. They cannot remedy barrenness; but they may correct redundancy. They point out proper models for imitation. They bring into view the chief beauties that ought to be studied, and the principal faults that ought to be avoided; and thereby tend to enlighten taste, and to lead genius from unnatural deviations, into its proper channel. What would not avail for the production of great excellencies, may at least serve to prevent the commission of considerable errors. (5)

Both by precept and by example, Blair authorizes a prose that is notable for its balance; its quiet, plain-spoken eloquence; the belief that "true rhetoric and sound logic are very nearly allied" (5). Above all, Blair praises *perspicuity* of style, which itself comprises—in a disconcerting repetition of *p*'s—"Purity, Propriety, and Precision" (100). For Blair, *taste*, the faculty that allows us to judge whether a written style is good or bad, "is far from being an arbitrary principle, which is subject to the fancy of every individual, and which admits of no criterion for determining whether it be false or true." Rather, "its foundation is the same in all human minds," "built upon sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature; and which, in general, operate with the same uniformity as our other intellectual principles" (19).

Because taste has its roots in a universal human nature, and because his wide reading in the masterpieces of ancient and modern literature has shown him the close link between language and human nature, Blair throughout his *Lectures* is eager to prescribe some stylistic devices and practices, even as he proscribes others. For example, Blair judges “words and phrases that are imported from other Languages, or that are obsolete, or new-coined, or used without proper authority” as incompatible with purity of style (100). Invented words and foreign words, newly compounded words—all such should be “used with a sparing hand” even in poetry, and “in prose, such innovations are more hazardous, and have a worse effect. They are apt to give Style an affected and conceited air; and should never be ventured upon, except by such, whose established reputation gives them some degree of dictatorial power over Language” (101). In sum, “a plain native Style”—meaning, of course, an *English* style—is the best choice (101). Blair lauds metaphor as a figure of great beauty but cautions against its undisciplined use: “Figures and Metaphors . . . should, on no occasion, be stuck on too profusely; and never should be such as refuse to accord with the strain of our sentiment. Nothing can be more unnatural, than for a writer to carry on a train of reasoning, in the same sort of Figurative Language which he would use in description” (160). Blair further urges writers to choose their metaphors with propriety: “we must beware of ever using such allusions as raise in the mind disagreeable, mean, vulgar, or dirty ideas. Even when Metaphors are chosen in order to vilify and degrade any object, an author should study never to be nauseous in his allusions,” for “in subjects of dignity, it is an unpardonable fault to introduce mean and vulgar Metaphors” (160), just as it is a flaw “to jumble metaphorical and plain language together” (162). As to the style proper to a historian, Blair asserts that a historian “must neither be a Panegyrist nor a Satirist. He must not enter into faction, nor give scope to affection: but, contemplating past events and characters with a cool and dispassionate eye, must present to his Readers a faithful copy of human nature . . . Gravity and dignity are essential characteristics of History; no light ornaments are to be employed, no flippancy of style, no quaintness of wit” (397).<sup>10</sup>

Anyone familiar with *Sartor Resartus* knows that in that wild book alone—let alone in *The French Revolution*, which Carlyle famously describes to Emerson

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<sup>10</sup> See Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), pp. 52-53, 54, 57-58.

and John Sterling as “a wild savage ruleless very bad Book,” “a wild savage Book, itself a kind of French Revolution” (*CL* 9: 82, 116)—Carlyle violates most of Blair’s dicta on style, nor was he willing to sacrifice his rough Scotticisms in an attempt to garner the approval of readers in London. As we have seen, Emerson was initially repelled by the style of *Sartor Resartus*, but his first observations of Carlyle the man should have taught him all he needed to know about Carlyle the writer: Emerson noted that the Carlyle he met at Craigenputtoch was “tall and gaunt, with a cliff-like brow, self-possessed, and holding his extraordinary powers of conversation in easy command; *clinging to his northern accent with evident relish*; full of lively anecdote, and with a streaming humor, which floated everything he looked upon” (qtd. in Richardson 145; my emphasis).

Neither John Sterling nor John Stuart Mill—two friends whose prose styles Hugh Blair would have approved for their perspicuity and precision—was able to praise Carlyle’s style, even as they both recognized its moral passion and energy. Three months after meeting Carlyle in February 1835, Sterling wrote Carlyle a letter that, like Emerson’s, takes the author to task for the style of *Sartor Resartus*, “its headlong self-asserting capriciousness” evident in “the structure of the sentences, the lawless oddity, and strange heterogeneous combination and allusion” (*Life of John Sterling*, in *Works* 11:109). Worst of all is the diction: “A good deal of this is positively barbarous,” Sterling charges, particularly the array of coinages—“environment,” “vestural,” “stertorous,” “visualised,” “complected”—that appear in the first twenty pages of the book and which “are words, so far as I know, without any authority; some of them contrary to analogy; and none repaying by their value the disadvantage of novelty” (110). For three pages Sterling itemizes his charges against Carlyle’s style in words that echo Blair, noting that it is “fatiguing and faulty precisely by being too emphatic, forcible and pointed; and so straining the attention to find its meaning, or the admiration to appreciate its beauty” (112). Sterling, eleven years Carlyle’s junior, schools the older man on “the importance, in a work of imagination, of not too much disturbing in the reader’s mind the balance of the New and Old. The former addresses itself to his active, the latter to his passive faculty; and these are mutually dependent, and must co-exist in certain proportion, if you wish to combine his sympathy and progressive exertion with willingness and ease of attention” (112).

As in the letter to Emerson, Carlyle responds to Sterling with surprising mildness, willing to concede that the word *talented* is a barbarism beneath

contempt but unwilling to concede much else. In an important, well-known letter of 4 June 1835, Carlyle observes that Sterling's

objections as to phraseology and style have good grounds to stand on; many of them indeed are considerations to which I myself was not blind; which there (unluckily) were no means of doing more than nodding to as one passed. A man has but a certain strength; imperfections cling to him, which if he wait till he have brushed off entirely, he will spin forever on his axis, advancing nowhither. . . . If one has thoughts not hitherto uttered in English Books, I see nothing for it but that you must use words not found there, must *make* words,—with moderation and discretion, of course. That I have not always done it *so*, proves only that I was not strong enough; an accusation to which I for one will never plead not guilty. (*CL* 8:134)

At the same time, Carlyle refuses to be bound by another's notion of purity of style—the reference to Blair is unmistakable: “Do you reckon this really a time for Purism of Style; or that Style (mere dictionary style) has much to do with the worth or unworth of a Book? I do not: with whole ragged battallions [*sic*] of Scott's-Novel Scotch, with Irish, German, French and even Newspaper Cockney (when “Literature” is little other than a Newspaper) storming in on us, and the whole structure of our Johnsonian English breaking up from its foundations,—revolution *there* as visible as anywhere else! (*CL* 8:135).

A year later, Mill tells Carlyle that “the only general remark I have to make on the stile [of Carlyle's essay ‘Memoirs of Mirabeau’] is that I think it would often *tell* better on the reader if what is said in an abrupt, exclamatory, & interjectional manner were said in the ordinary grammatical mode of nominative and verb” (see *CL* 9:16, n. 6.). This time Carlyle positively bristles:

As to my quarrel with the Nominative-and-verb, I do assure you it is one that I daily reflect on with great sorrow; but it is not a quarrel of my seeking. I mean, that the common English mode of writing has to do with what I call *hearsays* of things; and the great business for me, in which alone I feel any comfort, is recording the *presence*, bodily concrete coloured presence of things;—for which the Nominative-and-verb, as I find it Here and Now, refuses to stand me in due stead. Hence our quarrel; and separation, really an unblessed one! (*CL* 9:16)

Perhaps feeling he was too sharp with Mill, Carlyle lessens the sting with a Scottish anecdote, one that reverses for a moment the usual understanding of *center* and *periphery*: “On the whole I am too much in the state the Scotch Pedlar

thought the Londoners in: ‘A very good people, Ma’am, very clever people; but *terribly aff for a lANGitch*’” (CL 9:15). Those same Londoners, Carlyle reported to Sterling in June 1837, were uncertain what to make of *The French Revolution*, just published: “As to the Book, I rather avoid hearing about it, what clack there may be about it; of lamentation, admonition: ‘The style; ah, the style!’ These poor people seem to think a style can be put off or put on not like a *skin* but like a coat! Now I refer it to Sterling himself . . . whether a skin be not verily the product and close kinsfellow of all that lies under it; exact type of the nature of the beast: *not* to be plucked off without flaying and death” (CL 9:229).

If we believe Carlyle himself, then, he had no choice but to “leave Blair’s *Lectures* quite behind”—no choice, that is, but to leave behind a prose style suitable for a world that had exploded in 1789. Even Mill came to see the justice in Carlyle’s style even as he abhorred it as a model for others: as he wrote to Sterling in 1840, “‘Art’ [and I would add Blair’s *Rhetoric*] needs earnest but quiet times—in ours I am afraid that Art itself to be powerful must be polemical—Carlylean not Goethean.” It is undoubtedly a good thing that Carlyle never was appointed to the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh, where he must surely have frustrated his earnest but puzzled students and horrified his colleagues. As Mill wryly noted, “I think Carlyle’s costume should be left to Carlyle whom alone it [be]comes & in whom it would soon become unpleasant if it were made common” (CL 12:279).



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It was an honor for me to deliver the 2012 Thomas Green Lecture, and I am grateful to Aileen Christianson, Chair of the Carlyle Society, and to Ian Campbell, the Society's President, for extending the invitation. Members of the Carlyle Society and Carlyle scholars worldwide owe a debt of gratitude to Aileen and Ian for organizing the 2012 Carlyle Conference to mark the publication of the fortieth volume of the Duke-Edinburgh Edition of the *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*. The ongoing Carlyle letters project has spanned the whole of my career: in fact, I was still in high school—and had never heard of Thomas or Jane Welsh Carlyle, as best I can remember—when the first volumes appeared in 1970, but I learned about the Carlyles soon enough in graduate school at Duke University later in the 1970s, where I worked with Clyde Ryals and where Elizabeth Deis, my spouse-to-be, spent a summer tracking arcane references in the letters, puzzling over a mystifying reference to Castor and Pollux that turned out to be Carlyle's evening chop and potato. I can say without hesitation that everything I have written about Thomas Carlyle has been inflected by my reading in the *Collected Letters*, and I am grateful to Aileen and Ian and all those over the years who have produced for us the magnificent Duke-Edinburgh edition and have thereby fostered a collegial scholarly community that now extends worldwide.

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## Johnson, Boswell and The Patriarchal Life

Talk to the Carlyle Society at Edinburgh, 26 January 2013.

David Edward

In 1831 John Wilson Croker published his new edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. This gave rise to Macaulay's diatribe against Boswell in the *Edinburgh Review*, which conditioned people's views of Boswell for years to come and seems to have played some part in John Murray's refusal to publish the *Journals* when they were discovered.

In the following year, 1832, Thomas Carlyle published his review of the *Life of Johnson* in *Fraser's Magazine*. He discussed at some length all Bozzy's failings, oddities and shortcomings, but he also said "The man, once for all, had an 'open sense', an open loving heart, which so few have". Then he turned to the book:

"Which of us but remembers, as one of the sunny spots in his existence, the day when he opened these airy volumes, fascinating him by a true natural magic! It was as if the curtains of the past were drawn aside, and we looked mysteriously into a kindred country, where dwelt our Father; inexpressibly dear to us, but which seemed forever hidden from our eyes. For the dead Night had engulfed it; all was gone, vanished as if it had not been. Nevertheless, wondrously given back to us, there once more it lay; all bright, lucid, blooming; a little island of Creation amid the circumambient Void. There it still lies; like a thing stationary, imperishable, over which changeful Time were now accumulating itself in vain, and could not, any longer, harm it, or hide it."

The visit to the island of Raasay was perhaps the high point, both for Johnson and

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<sup>1</sup> This is a variant of an address to the Boswell Society at Auchinleck, 2 November 2011 (*Journal of the Boswell Society* 2012, p. 46), which was in turn a development of the Presidential Address to the Johnson Society of Lichfield in 1995 ("Johnson, Boswell and the Conflict of Loyalties", *Transactions of the Johnson Society* 1995, p.1).

for Boswell, of their Tour to the Hebrides. It is certainly one of the passages in which, as Carlyle said, “the past is wondrously given back to us ... all bright, lucid and blooming”.

On the day following their arrival in Raasay, Boswell went out for a walk with the Laird. When they returned Johnson went with them to see the old chapel.

“He was in fine spirits. He said, ‘This is truly the patriarchal life: this is what we came to find.’”

I have searched in vain for anything in the *Life*, the *Tour* or Johnson’s *Journey* where either of them explains that they came on purpose to find something special, other than to see the islands that had fascinated Johnson since he had read Martin Martin’s *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*.

So, was Johnson’s exclamation about ‘what we came to find’ just a *jeu d’esprit* because he ‘was in fine spirits’? Or were they really looking for something which Johnson felt they had found in Raasay? If so, what was it? And what was the significance to both of them of ‘the patriarchal life’?

I hope to show that Johnson’s remark was more than a chance remark on a day when he was in fine spirits. It reflects an aspect of Johnson’s life and his relationship with Boswell which, in this secular age, we may find it hard to understand.

The eighteenth century is often depicted as the age of enlightenment in which Britain threw off the shackles of autocracy represented by the Stuart Kings. According to that account, the Jacobite Rising of 1745 was the last gasp of the old order.

Johnson himself is often depicted as the archetypal common-sense Englishman, his down-to-earth attitude being typified by an incident in Harwich, when he was seeing Boswell off to Holland:

“When we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley’s ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter ... I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I shall never forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone ... ‘I refute it *thus*.’”<sup>2</sup>

Those who have this vision of Johnson as the archetypal common-sense eighteenth-century Englishman seem to have difficulty in reconciling it with

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<sup>2</sup> *Life* 6th August 1773.

Boswell's depiction of an argumentative High Tory who frequently expressed Jacobite sentiments. They attribute all that to Bozzy's perfervid imagination.

But we know from Johnson himself that he was constantly perturbed by a fear of Hell. He found it impossible to believe that David Hume had died a peaceful death without recanting his lack of religious faith. According to Scott, this led to a row with Adam Smith who had written a letter describing Hume's death.<sup>3</sup>

All this may seem irrational in this rational age, but we tend to forget the extent to which, in the eighteenth century, religion was not only a part of life but also intimately bound up with politics and philosophy. Let me illustrate by two examples.

At the beginning of *The Life*, Boswell recounts the story told by Miss Mary Adye of Lichfield:

“When Dr Sacheverel was at Lichfield, Johnson was not quite three years old. My grandfather Hammond observed him at the cathedral perched upon his father's shoulders, listening and gaping at the much celebrated preacher. Mr Hammond asked Mr Johnson how he could possibly think of bringing such an infant to church, and in the midst of so great a crowd. He answered, because it was impossible to keep him at home; for young as he was, he believed he had caught the publick spirit and zeal for Sacheverel, and would have staid for ever in the church, satisfied with beholding him.”

In his recent biography of Johnson, Peter Martin says that

“[This] iconic story makes Johnson out to be a type of saintly visitant to the temple, eagerly taking in the scholarly and spiritual wisdom of the church elders. ... Like many fathers who have to drag their children to certain events because they cannot at the moment do anything else with them, Michael [Johnson] may well have listened while his son gaped in boredom from above. It is more plausible that the boy was gaping at other gaping children.”

With great respect, that is not at all plausible. If Dr Sacheverell was simply a church elder dispensing scholarly and spiritual wisdom (like some sort of early 18<sup>th</sup> century Rowan Williams), why does he earn a chapter all to himself in Trevelyan's history of *England under Queen Anne*?<sup>4</sup> The answer is that, as told in the *Dictionary of National Biography*,

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix I to this paper, “The Row between Dr Johnson and Adam Smith”.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. 3, *The Peace and the Protestant Succession*, chapter III.

“Both in pamphlets and sermons [Sacheverell] advocated the high church and tory cause, and violently abused dissenters, low churchmen, latitudinarians and Whigs. . . . Not less violent than his pamphlets, his sermons on political and ecclesiastical matters attracted special attention owing to his striking appearance and energetic delivery.”

In 1702 Sacheverell preached a sermon in Oxford saying that

“the throne was based on the altar; that heresy and schism [by which he meant the Glorious Revolution] must lead to rebellion; and that, rather than strike sail to a party that is so open and avowed an enemy of our communion, he would hang out the bloody flag of defiance.”

Seven years later, in the year of Johnson’s birth (1709), Sacheverell was impeached in respect of two sermons, one in Derby the other in St Paul’s, which were described as ‘malicious, scandalous and seditious libels, highly reflecting upon Her Majesty and her government, the late happy revolution, and the protestant succession’.

When Queen Anne went privately to attend his trial in the House of Lords, she was greeted by the crowds with shouts of ‘God bless your majesty and the church. We hope your majesty is for Dr Sacheverell’. Riots followed, meeting-houses were attacked and the houses of several leading Whigs were threatened.

The following year, Sacheverell was convicted and the two offending sermons were ordered to be burned by the common hangman. Sacheverell was suspended from preaching for three years. News of the sentence was felt to be a triumph for him and the high-church and Tory party. The ladies were specially enthusiastic, filled the churches where he read prayers, besought him to christen their children, and called several after him.

So imagine the excitement in Lichfield when Dr Sacheverell came to preach in the Cathedral. Young Samuel was decidedly not at the Cathedral as ‘a saintly visitant to the temple, eagerly taking in the scholarly and spiritual wisdom of the church elders’. He was at his first political meeting and of course he couldn’t keep his eyes off Dr Sacheverell with his ‘striking appearance and energetic delivery’.

It is often worth resorting to the *DNB* to find out what Johnson’s harangues were really about. My second example of the close relationship between religion and politics comes from much later in Johnson’s life when he expressed admiration of Charles Leslie as ‘a reasoner, and a reasoner who was not to be



reasoned against'.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Leslie was the son of an Irish Bishop who became a vehement pamphleteer and preacher. Two of his pamphlets were entitled *The Snake in the Grass*, an attack on the Quakers, (1696) and *A short Method with the Jews* (1689). In 1695 he published *Gallienus Redivivus, or Murther will out*.

Macaulay identified *Gallienus Redivivus* as one of the principal sources for the facts of the Massacre of Glencoe. The target of the pamphlet was King William III – King Billy - whom Johnson described as ‘one of the most worthless scoundrels that ever existed’.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Macaulay, the great exponent of the Whig interpretation of history, described the death of King William as ‘the noble close of [a] noble career’.

Charles Leslie followed the Old Pretender to St Germain, Bar-le-Duc and Rome, but before doing so, he published *The Finishing Stroke, being a Vindication of the Patriarchal Scheme of Government*. This was an imaginary battle royal between, on the one hand, two apologists for the Glorious Revolution and, on the other, Hottentot, who stands for man in the supposed state of nature.

According to the *DNB*, “This is probably the most plausible presentation ever made of the older form of the patriarchal theory of the origin of government”.

Here, I think, is the clue to what Boswell and Johnson ‘came to find’ in the Hebrides.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century a great deal of political and philosophical writing was devoted to the origins of civil society. The explanation put forward, in various forms, by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau was that civil society is the result of some sort of compact (‘the social contract’) by which men sought to avoid the consequences of living in the state of nature where, Hobbes says, ‘the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’?<sup>7</sup>

An alternative view was that civil society was ordained by God. Bear in mind that it was natural, in a pre-Darwinian age, to look for a divine origin of civil society since there had not been much time for civil society to develop from a state of nature. According to the calculations of Archbishop Ussher, God had created the world on Sunday 23 October 4004 BC.

The patriarchal theory of government defended by Leslie had been developed by Sir Robert Filmer during the 17<sup>th</sup> century in a book called

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<sup>5</sup> Boswell’s footnote in *Life*, 9th June 1784.

<sup>6</sup> *Life* 6th April 1775.

<sup>7</sup> Hobbes *Leviathan*, Chapter 13.

*Patriarcha or the Natural Power of Kings* (published posthumously in 1680).

Filmer's theory is founded upon the proposition that government of a family by the father is the true origin and model of all government.

In summary, his theory was that God gave authority to Adam, who had complete control over his descendants. From Adam this authority passed to Noah, and from him to Shem, Ham and Japheth, from whom the patriarchs inherited the absolute power which they exercised over their families and servants. It is from these patriarchs that all kings and governors derive their authority. That authority is therefore absolute, and founded upon divine right.

Filmer's theory still held considerable interest for Jeremy Bentham – no High Tory - more than a century later. He wrote:

“Filmer's origin of government is exemplified everywhere ... In every family there is government, in every family there is subjection, and subjection of the most absolute kind: the father, sovereign, the mother and the young, subjects. ... Under the authority of the father, and his assistant and prime minister, the mother, every human creature is enured to subjection, is trained up into a habit of subjection. But, the habit once formed, nothing is easier than to transfer it from one object to another. Without the previous establishment of domestic government, blood only, and probably a long course of it, could have formed political government.”<sup>8</sup>

So it is easy to see why, in 1773, when they came to the Hebrides, the last surviving home of the clan system, the patriarchal theory of government should have been a hot topic of discussion between Johnson, the high Tory, and Boswell, the son of a Scottish Laird – the Scottish Laird being, as Carlyle reminds us, ‘the hungriest and vainest of all bipeds yet known’.

A day or two before crossing to the delights of Raasay, they had spent a distinctly less agreeable couple of days with Sir Alexander Macdonald at Armadale. They were appalled to hear of Macdonald's policy of racked rents and forced emigration. Boswell records that:

“My endeavours to rouse the English-bred Chieftain, in whose house we were, to the feudal and patriarchal feelings proving ineffectual, Dr Johnson this morning tried to bring him to our way of thinking. [Note: ‘our way of thinking’] *Johnson*: ‘Were I in your place, sir, in seven years I would

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Clark *English Society 1688-1832*, pages 75-6.

make this an independent island. I would roast oxen whole, and hang out a flag as a signal to the Macdonalds to come and get beef and whisky'. . . . We attempted in vain to communicate to him a portion of our enthusiasm. He bore with so polite a good-nature our warm, and what some might call Gothick, expostulations, on this subject, that I should not forgive myself, were I to record all that Dr Johnson's ardour led him to say."<sup>9</sup>

That is what Boswell wrote in the published *Tour*; but we know from his private *Journal* what 'Dr Johnson's ardour led him to say':

"'Sir, we shall make nothing of him. He has no more ideas of a chief than an attorney who has twenty houses in a street and considers how much he can make of them. All is wrong. He has nothing to say to the people when they come about him.' My beauty of a cousin<sup>10</sup>, too, did not escape. . . . Mr Johnson said, 'This woman would sink a ninety-gun ship. She is so dull...'"

Incidentally, it is worth noting that the criticism of Macdonald in the later eighteenth century has echoes in the later criticisms of the landowners who were responsible for the Clearances.

Raasay was a total contrast to Armadale. Their stay there inspired one of the few lyrical passages in Johnson's *Journey*:

"Raasay has little that can detain a traveller, except the Laird and his family: but their power wants no auxiliaries. Such a seat of hospitality, amidst the winds and waters, fills the imagination with a delightful contrariety of images. Without is the rough ocean and the rocky land, the beating billows and the howling storm: within is plenty and elegance, beauty and gaiety, the song and the dance. In Raasay, if I could have found an Ulysses, I had fancied a Phaeacia."

Phaeacia in Homer's *Odyssey* was the land where Odysseus, the epic Wanderer, came to shore after being shipwrecked and the king's daughter, Nausicaa, came down to the beach with her handmaidens to play beach ball. It was at Phaeacia that he told the story of his wanderings after the fall of Troy. I will come back to that passage later.

I'm afraid it rather takes the shine off Johnson's lyrical praise of Raasay to know that the extravagance of the Laird in creating his Phaeacia caused his

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<sup>9</sup> *Tour* 4th September 1773.

<sup>10</sup> Lady Macdonald, formerly Miss Bosville of Yorkshire

grandson, in an effort to fend off his creditors, to evict the crofters from part of the island and eventually, when that failed, to abdicate and emigrate.

That, however, lay in the future and in 1773 Johnson was able to say that ‘This is truly the patriarchal life. This is what we came to find’. The old clan system, exemplified by Macleod of Raasay and betrayed by Macdonald of Sleat, was the very embodiment of the patriarchal life.

If we bear in mind that this was all part of what Boswell called ‘our way of thinking’, then I believe many other aspects of their journey to the Hebrides and other aspects of Johnson’s strongly expressed opinions become more comprehensible – notably his fairly frequent expressions of sympathy with Jacobitism.

Before coming to Johnson’s views on the subject, it is worth recalling an anecdote noted by Croker. Princess Augusta Sophia, the second daughter of George III was ‘the handsomest of all the Princesses’. In spite of propositions, she never married. In his diary for 10 February 1828 Croker records:

“[A] curious anecdote, which explains several particulars in the conduct and feelings of the Hanover family since their accession. Princess Augusta said lately to a private friend: ‘I was ashamed to hear myself called Princess Augusta, and never could persuade myself that I was so, as long as any of the Stuart family were alive; but after the death of Cardinal York [in 1807], I felt myself to be really Princess Augusta’.”<sup>11</sup>

The story is illustrative of an ambivalence that persisted long after Culloden – in some circles at least - about the legitimacy of the so-called Glorious Revolution and the Hanoverian Succession, whatever their merits and advantages in other respects.

The execution of Charles I and the expulsion of James VII & II were assaults on the divinely ordered state of civil society, the throne being, as Sacheverell said, based on the altar. That was, for a Tory, a matter of principle, and it explains Johnson’s violent reaction to Boswell’s father saying that Cromwell had done good to his country by teaching kings that they have a joint in their neck.<sup>12</sup>

When Boswell pointed out to Johnson that David Hume, ‘some of whose writings were very unfavourable to religion’, was a Tory, Johnson replied,

“‘Sir, Hume is a Tory by chance, as being a Scotchman; but not upon a principle of duty; *for he has no principle*. If he is anything, he is a

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<sup>11</sup> The Croker Papers, 2nd edition (1885) Vol. I, p. 406, cited in Clark, *cit.sup.*, at page 161.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix II.

Hobbist’ ”<sup>13</sup>

In London Johnson worshipped at St Clement Danes in the Strand, where there is now a statue of him in front of the church. Back in 1721 the church was in the news for its handsome new picture of Charles I. A new altarpiece installed in 1725 was said to depict Clementina Sobieska, mother of Bonny Prince Charlie, as an angel. There was an outcry and it was removed.

Prince Charlie himself is said to have been received into the Church of England at St Clement Danes during a clandestine visit in 1750. He is also said to have attended a Jacobite meeting in one of Johnson’s favourite haunts – the Crown and Anchor Tavern opposite the Church.

Jacobitism was not simply a sentimental adherence to a lost cause but a matter of religious and therefore political principle. It is not necessary to say that Johnson was a Jacobite or that that he was not. It is enough to say that he was ambivalent, as when he said that ‘if holding up his right hand would have secured victory at Culloden to Prince Charles’s army, he was *not sure* he would have held it up’.<sup>14</sup>

If he was ambivalent, it becomes easier to understand some of his outbursts, and Boswell’s rather laboured attempts to prove that he didn’t believe in the divine right of kings and that he was not a Jacobite.

Possibly, like the Duchess’s baby in *Alice in Wonderland*, Johnson sometimes did it only to annoy because he knew it teases. Possibly, as Boswell says, he did it ‘to exercise both his pleasantry and ingenuity’, as when he took Mr Langton’s niece by the hand and said, “My dear I hope you are a Jacobite”. Mr Langton was greatly annoyed, and Johnson replied

““Why, Sir, I meant no offence to your niece, I meant a great compliment. A Jacobite, Sir, believes in the divine right of Kings. He that believes in the divine right of Kings believes in a Divinity. A Jacobite believes in the divine right of Bishops. He that believes in the divine right of Bishops believes in the divine authority of the Christian religion. Therefore, Sir, a Jacobite is neither an Atheist nor a Deist. That cannot be said of a Whig; for Whiggism is a negation of all principle.””<sup>15</sup>

Note, even there, the same theme of Jacobitism (or, if you like, Toryism) as a matter of principle. Belief in the divine right of kings in the absolutist form

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<sup>13</sup> *Life* 30th September 1773 (italics added).

<sup>14</sup> *Life* 14th July 1763.

<sup>15</sup> *Life* 14th July 1763 (italics added).

asserted by King Charles I and his father, James VI and I, is not necessarily the same as a belief in the divine character of kingship – a character that is conferred, not by coronation, the symbol of secular authority, but by the ritual of anointing. The sacred character of the ritual in the coronation service is symbolised by the fact that it takes place under a canopy shielded from view, while the choir sings “Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon King”. After anointing, the monarch is dressed in the vestments of the Byzantine emperors - the dalmatic, stole and pallium which are also liturgical vestments of the clergy.

So – back to Skye. At Coirechatachan, Johnson kept up

“a close whispering conference with Mrs Mackinnon [Flora Macdonald’s sister], which, however, was loud enough to let us hear that the subject of it was the particulars of Prince Charles’s escape about the particulars she knew of the Prince’s escape. The company were entertained and pleased to observe it. Upon that subject there was a warm union between the *soul* of Mr Samuel Johnson and that of an Isle of Skye farmer’s wife. It is curious to see people, though ever so much removed from each other in the general system of their lives, come close together *on a particular point which is common to each*. ... We were merry with Coirechatachan on Mr Johnson’s whispering with his wife. She cried, ‘I’m in love with him. What is it to live and not to love?’ So she humoured our merriment. At the same time, she was really most heartily taken with his conversation. Upon her saying something, which I did not hear or cannot remember, he seized her hand keenly and kissed it. Here was *loyalty strongly exemplified*.”<sup>16</sup>

That is the version in Boswell’s Journal. The last sentence about ‘loyalty strongly exemplified’ was omitted in the published version. Also omitted in the published version was a comment in Boswell’s Journal on their hearing Flora Macdonald’s account of the Prince’s escape:

“Mr Johnson and I were both visibly of the *old interest* (to use the Oxford expression), kindly affectioned at least, and perhaps too openly so.”<sup>17</sup>

Flora Macdonald does not take up many lines in Johnson’s *Journey*. But his meeting with her caused him to write two sentences which, in their classic simplicity, are (I think) amongst the most moving in English literature:

“We were entertained with the usual hospitality by Mr Macdonald and his

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<sup>16</sup> *Journal of a Tour* 28 September 1773.

<sup>17</sup> *Journal* 13th September 1773.

lady, Flora Macdonald, a name that will be mentioned in history and, if courage and fidelity be virtues, mentioned with honour. She is a woman of middle stature, soft features, gentle manners, and elegant presence.”

The Macleods of Raasay, too, father and son, were closely involved in the Prince’s escape. So, when Johnson wrote ‘In Raasay, if I could have found an Ulysses, I had fancied a Phaeacia’, is it fanciful to suggest that the Ulysses of his imagination was that other Wanderer, Prince Charles? The presence of the Prince would have completed the picture of the patriarchal life which they had come to find.

As I suggested earlier, it is difficult for some of us at least, in this secular, post-Darwinian age, to imagine ourselves in the mindset of people who believed that God created the world on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 4004 BC and who believed literally in the fires of Hell. It is difficult to accept as a tenable political argument that the form of civil society has been divinely ordained. And it is even harder to be remotely ambivalent about the divine right of kings.

Some may still be less enthusiastic than others about the Glorious Revolution. But there are not many who see it as such an offence to true religion as to justify, in the words of Dr Sacheverell, hanging out the bloody flag of defiance. Such disputes seem terribly remote from our world. And it is sometimes difficult to understand why Johnson, the supposedly down-to-earth, common-sense Englishman, got so worked up about them, or why Boswell thought some of his tirades worth recording for the benefit of posterity.

But, if we think that, we miss the point. As Carlyle said, when he ‘opened these airy volumes’,

“It was as if the curtains of the past were drawn aside, and we looked mysteriously into a kindred country ... inexpressibly dear to us, but which seemed forever hidden from our eyes.”

I hope that, in some small way, I have offered some signposts to help you find your way in that inexpressibly dear, hidden but kindred country.

## APPENDIX I

### The Row between Dr Johnson and Adam Smith.

Scott gives a highly circumstantial account of the row between Dr Johnson and Adam Smith:

“At Glasgow Johnson had a meeting with Smith, which terminated strangely. John Millar used to report that Smith, obviously much discomposed, came into a party who were playing cards. The Doctor’s appearance suspended the amusement, for as all knew he was to meet Johnson that evening, everyone was curious to know what had passed. Adam Smith, whose temper seemed much ruffled, answered only at first “He is a brute! He is a brute”. Upon closer examination it appeared that Dr Johnson no sooner saw Smith than he brought forward a charge against him for something in his famous letter on the death of Hume. Smith said he had vindicated the truth of the statement. “And what did the Doctor say?” was the universal query. “Why, he said --- he said ---” said Smith, with the deepest impression of resentment, “he said --- ‘You lie!’” “And what did you reply?” “I said: ‘You are the son of a b---h!’ On such terms did the two great moralists meet and part, and such was the classic dialogue between them.”<sup>18</sup>

John Millar, to whom Scott refers as the source of the story, would have been Professor John Millar, who was Professor of Law at Glasgow and, like Scott, a member of the Faculty of Advocates. However, as Croker pointed out,

“This story is *certainly* erroneous in the particulars of the *time, place* and *subject* of the alleged quarrel; for Hume did not die for nearly three years after Johnson’s only visit to Glasgow; nor was Smith there then.”

Yet the relationship between Johnson, Boswell and Adam Smith is a curious one. The chronology of meetings between Johnson and Smith is uncertain, but there is little doubt that some sort of row did occur.

Boswell matriculated at Glasgow University in 1759 expressly to attend the lectures of Adam Smith who was then Professor of Moral Philosophy. He spoke very warmly of them:

“My greatest reason for coming hither was to hear Mr Smith’s lectures

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<sup>18</sup> Scott to Croker, cited above, footnote 1, pp. 113-15. This story seems too circumstantial to have been made up, and it is certainly true that Boswell records Johnson as having said “Sir, I was once in company with Smith, and we did not take to each other” (*Life* 14 July 1763).



(which are truly excellent.) His Sentiments<sup>19</sup> are striking, profound and beautiful, the method in which they are arranged clear, accurate and orderly, his language correct perspicuous and elegantly phrased. His private character is really amiable. He has nothing of that formal stiffness and Pedantry which is too often found in Professors. So far from that, he is a most polite well-bred man, is extremely fond of having his Students with him and treats them with all the easiness and affability imaginable.”<sup>20</sup>

Smith in turn wrote Boswell a friendly letter ‘which he never tired of quoting’.<sup>21</sup>

In *The Life*, under the date 14 July 1763 (only two months after Boswell met Johnson for the first time), Boswell narrates:

“He enlarged very convincingly upon the excellence of rhyme over blank verse in English poetry. I mentioned to him that Dr Adam Smith, in his lectures on composition, when I studied under him in the College of Glasgow, had maintained the same opinion strenuously, and I repeated some of his arguments. JOHNSON. ‘Sir, I was once in company with Smith, and we did not take to each other; but had I known that he loved rhyme as much as you tell me he does, I should have hugged him.’”

This discussion does not appear in Boswell’s *Journal* for that date.

The next reference to Adam Smith is in *The Tour* (Friday 29 October 1773) when Johnson and Boswell were in Glasgow:

“Mr Anderson accompanied us while Dr Johnson viewed this beautiful city. He told me, that one day in London, when Dr Adam Smith was boasting of it, he turned to him and said, ‘Pray, sir, have you ever seen Brentford?’ This was surely a strong instance of his impatience, and spirit of contradiction. I put him in mind of it today, while he expressed his admiration of the elegant buildings, and whispered to him, ‘Don’t you feel some remorse?’”<sup>22</sup>

Next, in his *Journal* for 17 March 1776, Boswell records Johnson saying to him that

“Adam Smith was a most disagreeable fellow after he had drank some

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<sup>19</sup> Smith’s *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* was published in 1759.

<sup>20</sup> *Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange*, ed. Walker, p.7, cited in Phillipson, *Adam Smith: an Enlightened Life*, p.135

<sup>21</sup> Pottle *The Earlier Years* p.43. See, for example, *Journal* 22 December 1765 and 3 April 1775, and letter to Belle de Zuylen 9 July 1764 (*Boswell in Holland* p.308).

<sup>22</sup> This story is repeated as one of ‘Johnson’s sayings’ towards the end of *The Life* (Hill, revised Powell, Vol. IV, p.186.)

wine, which, he said, ‘bubbled in his mouth’.”

Lastly, in *The Life*, under the date 29 April 1778, Boswell quotes William Robertson, Principal of Edinburgh University, as saying of Johnson,

“He and I have been always very gracious; the first time I met him was one evening at Strahan’s [the publisher’s], when he had just had an unlucky altercation with Adam Smith, to whom he had been so rough, that Strahan, after Smith was gone, had remonstrated with him, and told him that I was coming soon, and that he was uneasy to think that he might behave in the same manner to me.”

Whatever happened at Strahan’s on this occasion, it cannot have been anything to do with Adam Smith’s description of Hume’s death since Hume did not die until 1776 and Robertson met Johnson in Edinburgh in 1773 (after meeting him for the first time at Strahan’s in London).

Adam Smith, for his part, had a ‘very contemptuous opinion’ of Johnson whose eccentricities offended his sense of propriety:

“I have seen that creature, said he, bolt up in the midst of a mixed company and, without any previous notice, fall upon his knees behind a chair, repeat the Lord’s Prayer, and then resume his seat at table. He has played this freak over and over perhaps five or six times in the course of an evening. It is not hypocrisy, but madness.”<sup>23</sup>

So there is no doubt that there was already bad blood between them before Smith wrote his *Letter to Strahan* describing Hume’s death which was published 1777 as a supplement to Hume’s autobiography *My Own Life*. There is also no doubt that the publication of the *Letter* caused outrage amongst the High Church party in England and in The Club, founded by Johnson, of which Smith had been a member.<sup>24</sup>

So, even if the chronology, place and subject matter of Scott’s story may be wrong, it is possible that the account is true at least to this extent, that there was a formidable row between Johnson and Smith for some reason connected with Johnson’s High Church opinions and Smith’s religious scepticism. It is also possible that Boswell refrained from publishing an account of it, or even noting it in his *Journal*, because of the affection he felt for both men and the debt he owed them. If so, it is another example of what Carlyle called his ‘open loving heart’.

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<sup>23</sup> Phillipson, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>24</sup> Phillipson *op.cit.*,pp.246-47.

## APPENDIX II

### The Row between Dr Johnson and Lord Auchinleck

On the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1773, there occurred a monumental row between Johnson and Boswell's father which inspired one of Rowlandson's *Picturesque Beauties of Boswell*. Johnson threatens to bring a large tome entitled *Liturgy* down on the head of old Auchinleck, while Bozzy stands terrified in the background with his thumbs in his mouth.

Bozzy forbears to describe that row 'for the entertainment of the publick'. But Scott gave Croker a version of it that had probably been handed down amongst the advocates in Parliament House in Edinburgh. According to Scott, "Johnson pressed upon the old judge the question, what good Cromwell ... had ever done to his country. After being much tortured, Lord Auchinleck at last spoke out: 'God, Doctor! He gart kings ken that they had a lith in their neck - he taugt kings that they had a joint in their necks'. Jamie then set to mediating between his father and the philosopher, and availing himself of the judge's sense of hospitality, which was punctilious, reduced the debate to more order."<sup>25</sup>

Boswell's account of the altercation gives us a delightful sidelight on his father's character and his relationship with his son:

"Dr Johnson challenged him ... to point out any theological works of merit written by Presbyterian ministers in Scotland. My father, whose studies did not lie much in that direction, owned to me afterwards that he was somewhat at a loss how to answer, but that luckily he recollected having read in catalogues the title of *Durham on the Galatians*; upon which he boldly said, 'Pray, sir, have you read Mr Durham's excellent commentary on the Galatians?' – 'No, sir,' said Dr Johnson. By this lucky thought my father kept him at bay, and for some time enjoyed his triumph; but his antagonist soon made a retort, which I forbear to mention."<sup>26</sup>

Boswell's relationship with his father is usually depicted as dry and disapproving. But here we have old Auchinleck confessing to his son that he had never read *Durham on the Galatians* and had only picked up the name in a catalogue. That

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<sup>25</sup> Scott to Croker 30th January 1829, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Grierson, Vol XI, page 114.

<sup>26</sup> *Life* 6th November 1773.

was enough to score a temporary victory over the Doctor. Boswell does not, even in his private Journal, record what Johnson's retort was that he 'forbore to mention', but Malone's recollection of the story was that:

”At Auchinleck, when old Mr Boswell pretended to recommend *Durham on the Galatians*, he concluded, ‘You may buy it at any time for half a crown or three shillings’. JOHNSON ‘Sir, it must be better recommended before I give half the money for it.’”<sup>27</sup>

Again, a cheap jibe that Boswell's open loving heart felt it better to forget.

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<sup>27</sup> *Journal*, ed. Pottle and Bennett, p. 443.

“Still a despotism, but an enlightened despotism”:  
Acton, Carlyle, and the Legacy of Frederick the Great

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Seen through the narrow lens of historical classification, Carlyle and Acton present a study in stark contrasts with few, if any, overlapping features. The outlines of each figure are distinct. On the one hand, there is Carlyle, the irascible Puritan apostle of heroes and hierarchy, and the champion of Luther, Cromwell, and Frederick the Great; on the other, there is Acton, the cosmopolitan Whig advocate of liberty and freedom of conscience, a devout Roman Catholic, and the confidant and adviser of Gladstone. Their temperaments seemed even more opposed than their opinions: if Carlyle spoke in relentless and unstoppable Jeremiads, bristling with Swiftian satire, Acton was spare, elliptical, elegant, and enigmatic. Herbert Paul recalled that to “draw Acton out, to make him declare himself upon some doubtful or delicate point, was a hopeless task. His face at once assumed the expression of the Sphinx” (Paul xiv). Yet these distinctions between the two men, valuable as they may be as signposts to their politics and philosophy, tend to conceal considerable common ground between them. It lay in their conception and craft of history, and in their shared notion that the past contained a spiritual dimension that was vital to its comprehension. In “On History” (1830) Carlyle had argued that a true history of religion amounted to a history of the world. Paying tribute to Acton in 1902, William Maitland recalled that he “toiled in the archives, hunting the little fact that makes the difference. He was deeply convinced that the history of religion lies near the heart of all history” (Paul lxiii).

What this spiritual sense meant to them as historians remains difficult to define, but it frequently acted as an emollient to their fixed convictions. Acton observed the presence of this empathetic power in Carlyle the historian, but he was notably reluctant to celebrate it. To a surprising extent, Acton regarded Carlyle as his rival, and from the outset of his career, he consciously sought to diminish his stature as a major historian. For all of his lightly worn erudition, Acton was as

tenacious a proselytizer and as ferocious an opponent as the Sage of Chelsea. Of Acton, Paul noted, “Few people had stronger opinions than he, and their foundation was so solid that it was almost impossible to displace them. . . . Any apology, or even excuse, for departure from the highway of the Decalogue he regarded as in itself a crime” (Paul xii). Nowhere was this streak of critical obduracy more apparent than in his attitudes to Carlyle, which tended to harden as Acton began to pursue his own historical studies in depth. In a letter to Mary Gordon in 1881, he explained the origins of this antipathy, which developed as a result of his exposure to Coleridge: “It is by accident, by the accident that I read Coleridge first, that Carlyle never did me any good. . . . I should speak differently if, reading him earlier, I had learned from him instead of Coleridge the lesson of intellectual detachment” (70–71). Resistant to Carlyle’s satire of Coleridge’s philosophy in *The Life of John Sterling* (1851), Acton remained faithful to philosophy of the Highgate muse.

In his estimate, Carlyle’s brand of “intellectual detachment” was considerably inferior to Coleridge’s. He was the “most detestable of historians” because he subordinated the past to his “doctrine of heroes, the doctrine that the will is above law . . . that the cause justifies its agents.” His “robust mental independence is not the same thing as originality” (70), and the German writers whom he lauded—Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Richter, and Novalis—lacked the kind of rigor that Ranke brought to the study of the past. Acton held up the German historian as an exemplary antithesis to Carlyle. In his “Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History” delivered at Cambridge when he was appointed Regius Professor of History in June 1895, he lauded Ranke as “the representative of the age which instituted the modern study of History. He taught it be critical, to be colourless, and to be new. We meet him at every step, and he has done more for us than any other man” (18). The triumph of the Rankean school meant the eclipse of Carlylean history. Germany “gave [Carlyle] his most valuable faculty, that of standing aside from the current of contemporary English ideas, and looking at it from an Archimedean point,” Acton informed Mary Gladstone, “but it gave him no rule for judging, no test of truth, no definite conviction, no certain method and no sure conclusion” (70). He granted that Carlyle “had historic grasp—which is a rare quality—some sympathy with things that are not evident, and a vague, fluctuating notion of the work of impersonal forces.” Still, Acton’s final verdict was a damning one: “There is a flash of genius in ‘Past and Present,’ and in the ‘French Revolution,’ though it is a wretched history. And he invented Oliver Cromwell. That is the positive result of him, that, and his personal influence over many considerable minds—a stimulating, not a guiding

influence” (70–71). This distinction was crucial to Acton, who sought to supplant Carlyle as the leading British historian of the age by aligning himself with “critical” and “colourless” Rankean prescriptions. In place of “stimulating influence,” Acton proposed to offer the “stimulating guidance” that in his view Carlyle had so blatantly failed to deliver.

The first step he took in this direction was to attack Carlyle’s *History of Frederick the Great* (1858–65), which affronted his Rankean principles and his liberal view of history in equal measure. Carlyle’s bombastic style in the work was at one with the shrill tenor of his conclusions. The “Proem” to his epic typified his approach. Whereas Ranke “decided effectually to repress the poet, the patriot, the religious or political partisan, to sustain no cause, to banish himself from his books, and to write nothing that would gratify his own feelings or disclose his private connections” (*Lectures* 19), Carlyle unfolded himself with a reckless lack of discrimination and balance. Acton was especially perturbed by Carlyle’s sweeping attempt to redefine Frederick’s political legacy in the context of the French Revolution. In challenging the “sham” diplomacy of eighteenth-century Europe, the King of Prussia had prepared the way for the annihilation of a corrupt and nihilistic political order. “This is one of the peculiarities of Frederick,” Carlyle argued, “that he is hitherto the last of the kings; that he ushers in the French Revolution, and closes an epoch of World-History. Finishing off forever the trade of king, think many; who have grown profoundly dark as to kingship and him” (12:6).

Acton recognized the audacity as well as the originality of this thesis, which revealed Carlyle’s peculiar ability to fathom the deeper repercussions of historical behavior. Though it differed from his own assessment of Frederick’s significance, it did so in ways that reminded Acton of his uncomfortable proximity to Carlyle. Acton regarded the King of Prussia as a modern figure and a harbinger of liberalism, though his despotic tendencies clouded his comprehension of the benefits of freedom. Acton preferred to see Frederick as the king who opened up “an epoch of World-History” through his tolerance and culture, and who set an example that would be followed, not by the Jacobins, but by the American Revolutionaries. Oddly, the recondite energies of both historians led them to characteristically nuanced readings of Frederick’s character—the King as a proto-Jacobin or as proto-Jeffersonian liberal—yet Acton was determined to resist any possibility of a rapprochement between himself and Carlyle. The danger of *Frederick the Great* was that it transmitted a powerful, if confused and contradictory riposte to the liberal philosophy of history that Acton was determined to uphold. For liberalism

and liberal history to prevail, Carlyle had to be discredited.

Acton's long debate with Carlyle over Frederick began in an acerbic review he wrote in the *Rambler* of the first two volumes of *Frederick the Great* in 1858, when Acton himself was twenty-four years old. Citing a number of factual errors in the biography—including one that suggested the author's blatant anti-Catholic bias—Acton insisted that Carlyle had to be held to a higher standard of judgment than other British historians “for no one has spoken more deeply or truly on the character of the dignity of history” (429). Carlyle's deep grasp of historical processes sprang from his intense disillusionment with the present: “The disgust which Mr. Carlyle feels for the men and things of his own time seemed to give him a clearer eye for the past than most of those possess whose vision is distorted by the prejudices of their age. He showed an intelligence of things which no other English historian has understood.” The key to his clairvoyance lay in his spiritual perception of historical reality: “He dwelt upon the invisible impersonal forces that act in history, and appreciated, with rare sagacity the true significance and sequence of events” (429).

But light and darkness coexisted in dim uncertainty in Carlyle's religious makeup. His personal confusion was profound, and so was his tendency to vanquish this confusion by abrupt and often crude leaps of faith. According to Acton, Carlyle “could not distinguish in history what was unknown to him in religion: thus he fell to the exclusive contemplation of certain typical individuals, whose greatness appeared to supply what he wanted, an object of worship, and personified invisible elements in visible men; he invests with an absurd dignity not only his relations, but their goods and chattels, and allows merely material things to eclipse the human interest of his subject” (429). Acton deliberately exaggerated Carlyle's veneration of Frederick and ignored his curious animadversions on the King's “Questionable” character. By Carlylean standards, *Frederick the Great* amounted to a subdued form of hero-worship. In the same paragraph that he commended the King of Prussia's realism, Carlyle also alluded mysteriously to less desirable elements in his personality: “To the last,” Frederick stands out as “a questionable hero . . . with much in him which one could have wished not there, and much wanting which one could have wished.” Nonetheless, Carlyle resolved to defend him on the grounds that “there is one feature which strikes you at an early period of the inquiry, that in his way he is a Reality; that he always means what he speaks; grounds his actions, too, on what he recognizes for the truth; and, in short, has nothing whatever of the hypocrite or Phantasm” (12:14).

Acton was so eager to contradict this view of Frederick that his youthful impetuosity got the better of his habitual caution. Committing a rare lapse of



judgment—he never commented on the affair later, though he did admit that *Les Matinees* was probably a forgery—Acton persuaded Williams and Norgate in 1863 to publish a confidential memoir of the King of Prussia, allegedly copied in secret at Sans-Souci in 1806 by Napoleon’s private secretary, the Baron de Méneval. As editor of the *Home and Foreign Review*, editor of the *Les Matinées*, and author of the article in the journal justifying its publication, he must have known that he was taking a large risk. But he clearly relished the opportunity to use the occasion to dent the credibility of Carlyle. In the preface to *Les Matinées royale, ou l’art de régner*, he announced that an “authentic and complete” text of the document was being published for the first time. Readers seeking further proof of its legitimacy could consult the essay (written by Acton), which would appear in the forthcoming issue of the *Home and Foreign Review*. Carlyle himself was dismissive of the piece in the first volume of *Frederick*, where he described it a “an impudent Pamphlet, forged by I knew not whom . . . every line of which betrays itself as false and spurious to a reader who has made every direct or effectual study of Frederick or his manners or affairs.” Written to disparage the King as an “adroit Machiavellian,” *Les Matinées Royales* stood as a valuable testimony of the political corruption that Frederick had heroically striven to cleanse. Carlyle gently mocked those who had offered to give him “original Manuscripts,” “twice over, gratis or nearly so, a priceless curiosity.” As to those who continued to believe in the veracity of the source, he quipped, “Ingenious gentlemen who believe that Beelzebub made this world, are not a class of gentlemen I can get any profit from.” Carlyle’s sarcasm projected itself as a red flag to Acton.

In his essay in the *Home and Foreign Review*, he spent relatively little space in reviewing the bibliographical evidence. His primary concern was to highlight the importance of this newly discovered manuscript for the understanding of a neglected chapter of European history. *Les Matinées Royales* gave “an authentic record of the motives and sentiments of . . . monarchy in the generation which preceded its fall.” Owen Chadwick remarked that Acton’s failure to spot the forgery proceeded from his impulsive desire to confirm his lifelong assumption that all governments were bad, “therefore, if a king with an almost absolute power said that the only way to govern well is for the ruler to be unscrupulous, this was a marvellous illustration of a continual danger which afflicts all governments.” Personal factors coincided with political ones. Chadwick notes that Acton was “half a Rhinelander by descent from his mother,” that he had “many links with Bavaria and was soon to marry a Bavarian,” and this his great guide and mentor, Ignaz von Dollinger, “was the

Christian leader of Bavaria” (16). None of these reasons can be discounted, yet Acton’s own comments suggest how deeply driven he was driven by his antipathy to Carlyle. He was determined to wrest the legacy of Frederick the Great from the hands of his British champion, so that the King’s “enlightened” characteristics could be assessed in the context of a liberal rather than either an authoritarian or revolutionary conception of historical change.

Carlyle’s version of Frederick’s life emphasized his repudiation of his “French” enthusiasms—fine clothes, young men (“Potsdamites,” as Voltaire called them), flute-playing, book-learning, and eventually Voltaire and Maupertuis—and his embrace of an austere and Puritanical stoicism that was rooted in strict service to Prussia. Frederick’s psychological struggle anticipated the epic conflict of France, which in 1789 furiously renounced aristocratic frippery and “Sham”, and purged itself of the corrupt adhesions of the *ancien regime*. This process of sublimation and transcendence anticipated the pattern of Revolution, during which sentimental effusiveness and rococo geniality violently yielded to Jacobin virtue and righteousness. Acton was determined to fracture the continuum that Carlyle had established between the self-denying regimentation of Prussia and the revolutionary zealotry of the “gospel according to Jean-Jacques.” He fathomed the powerful populist allure of the monarch whom Carlyle described in the opening pages of his biography, “a king every inch of him; though without the trappings of a king; with no crown but an old military cocked hat . . . no sceptre but one like Agamemnon’s walking stick cut from the woods,” dressed in “a mere blue coat with red stockings. . . . Not what is called a beautiful man; nor yet . . . what is called happy” (12:1–2). The incarnation of sobriety and restraint, Frederick was an apt symbol of the Prussian state, an authoritarian and paternalist model that for Carlyle was a humane alternative to the sclerotic monarchies of *ancien régime* Europe and the atomistic, laissez-faire constitutionalism of England.

Acton responded to Carlyle by treating Frederick’s monastic appearance as an elaborate and ingenious disguise, designed to enhance his own power and to identify it with the somber might of Prussia: “[H]is whole life, down to the smallest details, was carefully studied, for the purpose of deceiving and astonishing the world. . . . He was fond of good living, but obtained a reputation for great sobriety.” His tactics were ideally suited to the circumstances and mood of both the country and the age: “It is the code of the absolutism of a cultivated and unbelieving age; when religion had lost its authority with the masses; when the nobles were corrupt and the administration centralised; when the power of the press was exerted by

the propagation of certain theories, rather than by the publicity of authentic information.” Frederick’s confessions in *Les Matinées Royales* revealed the subtlety of his approach. He posed as a liberal ruler in order to expand the range of illiberal authority. Noted Acton, “He was probably the first sovereign in Europe who was tolerant purely from motives of policy.” Throughout his reign, “the public good and his own glory are the supreme law.” He regretted the necessity for such deception and he even conceded that it was “a misfortune for the people to live even under an enlightened despotism.”

Devoid of any spiritual leanings himself, Frederick still “understood the power of religious belief, both as a limit and as a protection to authority.” Christian morality provided a useful check to popular activism, and Frederick did nothing to lessen its force in a general way. Professing latitudinarian attitudes, he tried “to obliterate the distinctive characters of the different denominations, and to effect a general union of Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists.” Again, liberal measures were employed to achieve despotic aims. Frederick’s broader objective was always “to put an end to all that could divide men amongst themselves, in order that their duties as subjects might take precedence of everything else.” Acton neither condemned nor praised the author of *Les Matinées* for admitting to the use of such stratagems. With Rankean poise he offered a judicious summary of the probable impact of *Les Matinées Royales*: “It will not diminish the estimate which admirers of Frederick entertain of his abilities, nor reverse the judgment which his enemies have passed on his character.” But Acton was far less measured when he dealt with “Mr. Carlyle’s” argument that the King of Prussia was “a Reality; that he always means what he speaks.” On the contrary, Acton declared, “[*Les Matinées Royales*] show him as completely destitute of moral principle as Machiavelli’s Prince, but less liable to sacrifice great aims to petty weaknesses than any conspicuous character of modern times. No biographer has ever done justice to his profoundly calculating intellect, to his powers of dissimulation, to his cynical candour, or to his knowledge of the men of his time.” Perhaps Acton hoped that Carlyle, now preparing the final two volumes of his biography, would recognize the futility of his quest to redeem “the last of the Kings.”

Instead, the latter took advantage of Acton’s “historical disaster” (Chadwick 16) to pillory the detractors of Frederick for continuing to believe in the authenticity of *Les Matinées*. With merciless delight, Carlyle persuaded his secretary Joseph Neuberg to write a detailed letter to the *Athenaeum*, outlining the case for forgery: “[L]et them know what a mighty Pair of Ears (bigger than those of Balaam’s Ass)

their ‘Editor,’ ‘Contributor,’ their &c &c have put upon themselves” (CL 39:33). Neuberg duly complied and noted that “whilst the people in Prussia are preparing to commemorate . . . the conclusion of the Seven Year’s War . . . a respectable London publishing firm has thought fit to put forth a reprint of an often-printed gross lampoon on the hero of the said war, and even to claim a sort of originality for a production which, at its first appearance nearly a century ago, was officially denounced as a forgery” (193). Of the text itself, Neuberg remarked that “One feels humiliated to have to argue about such an article, somewhat as if one were called upon to demonstrate to an adult person that the moon was *not* made of green cheese” (194). Carlyle was more scathing. In the fourth volume of *Frederick*, he congratulated the editor of “this surprising brand-new mooncalf of a *Matinées*,” apparently “animated . . . it is said, by religious views,” for having given readers definitive proof of the original author of the forgery, Bonneville, secretary to the Maréchal de Saxe.

Acton’s humiliation was not quite complete. On 30 Jan. the *Times* disputed the authenticity of *Les Matinées*, citing the authority of “Professor of the Berlin Academy . . . who disposes of the authenticity of the work in a manner so conclusive as, apparently, to leave no room for reply.” In support of their position, the *Times* included a letter from Acton’s historian-hero Leopold von Ranke, who stated that he was “entirely convinced [the book] is a forgery.” Acton replied 3 Feb., and accused von Ranke of bias: “He is as strongly pledged as Mr. Carlyle to a view of the character of Frederick which does not quite consist with the authenticity of the *Matinées*, and it appears from his letter that he formed it without examining any of the earlier editions of the work.” Acton may have been relieved to let the matter rest, but he evidently never forgot the drubbing that he had received at the hands of Carlyle, and he retaliated effectively in *Lectures on the French Revolution* (1895-99; pbd. 1910) and in his *Lectures on Modern History* (1906). Yet the importance of the earlier debate they conducted about the King of Prussia extended far beyond the boundaries of professional rivalry and personal pique.

Notwithstanding Acton’s failure to identify the forgery of *Les Matinées*, he had dissected the motives of the Prussian king in ways that coalesced with Carlyle’s own uneasy handling of the “Questionable” ruler. As revelations of Frederick’s morality, *Les Matinées* was a far less shocking indictment of his integrity than his own memoirs, which Carlyle had used throughout his history. His narrative of transfiguration, which relied on Frederick’s “conversion” to a form of Protestant *Entsagen*, was never quite convincing because it contradicted the King’s frequent

affirmations of naked ambition and craving for renown. Carlyle's efforts to justify Frederick's invasion of Silesia in relation to broken promises, violated treaties, and Habsburg humiliation of Prussia eventually collapsed at the stage where he beckoned the reader to "Hear Frederick himself." The King's explanation constitutes a bald plea for conflating might with right: "It was a means of acquiring reputation; of increasing the power of the State; and of terminating what concerned the long-litigated question of the Berg-Jülich Succession." Carlyle's usual attempts to reconcile might with right are abandoned here, and it is Frederick's voice alone that dominates: "What are rights, never so just, which you cannot make valid? The world is full of such. If you have rights and can assert them into facts, do it; that is worth doing." Carlyle's subsequent endeavors to soften the King's image by stressing his loyalty to his soldiers, his love of ordinary Prussians, and his preoccupation with administering an efficient, equitable, and just state ring hollow when set against these "adroit Machiavellian" pronouncements.

Perhaps more fatally, Frederick's cynicism and ambition disqualified him from playing the role that Carlyle had chosen for him: the King who by his example rendered kingship redundant. In his *Lectures on the French Revolution* Acton noted that the Third Estate began by demanding from the King that "the State should be reformed, that the ruler should be their agent, not their master" (*French Revolution* 1). Frederick had governed with the promise that he could enact such reform while maintaining his position as the "master" of the "State." Carlyle clung to the illusion that such kings might reappear in history, making democracy and liberalism unnecessary. But Acton had demonstrated that "enlightened despotism," no matter how "enlightened," would never satisfy the widespread demand for greater freedom among the masses. Ironically, when he returned to the subject of Frederick the Great in *Lectures on Modern History*, Acton moved closer to Carlyle's estimate of the Prussian king. A host of reasons nudged him slightly towards this direction, including his growing skepticism of Benthamite utilitarianism; his hostility to John Stuart Mill's notion of free individuals pursuing self-interest and happiness without any link to tradition; his opposition to Pius IX's ultramontane authoritarianism and his blurring of the boundaries between religion and state; and his contempt for political economy and the supposedly ineluctable laws of Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus. Burke had originally reinforced these views, but Acton's gradual disillusionment with Toryism—and his interest in socialism—made him more receptive to the thinking of Carlyle.

But Acton had not forgotten or forgiven the author of *Frederick the Great*

for the debacle of *Les Matinéés*, and in his lectures on the French Revolution, he extracted a measure of revenge. Appealing to the public taste for fiction, rather than forgery, he invented an anecdote that was destined to become part of the texture of rote thinking about Carlyle the historian. According to Acton, Carlyle “was scared from the [British] Museum by an offender who sneezed in the Reading Room. As the French pamphlets were not yet catalogued, he asked permission to examine them and to make his selection at the shelves on which they stood. He complained that, having applied to a respectable official, he had been refused. Panizzi, furious at being described as a respectable official, declared that he could not allow the library to be pulled about by an unknown man of letters.” As a consequence, Carlyle was forced to fall back on “the usual modest resources of a private collection” (358). Neither accurate nor true, Acton’s vignette nevertheless served his purpose of demolishing Carlyle’s reputation as a trustworthy researcher. If he came to be associated with picturesque history, it was largely thanks to Acton, who derided his style and its spurious effects: “[T]he vivid gleam, the mixture of the sublime with the grotesque, make other opponents forget the impatient verdicts and the poverty of settled fact in the volumes that delivered our fathers from thralldom to Burke. They remain one of those disappointing stormclouds that give out more thunder than lightning” (358–59).

Yet Acton’s own lectures suggested his release from the “thralldom to Burke” as well as to Ranke, and his increasing fascination with the both Carlylean “lightning” and “thunder”. In the lectures he concentrated on the spiritual dimension of the French Revolution, which Carlyle had been the first to enunciate. Acton’s portrait of Robespierre, for example, was deeply affected by Carlyle’s “Sea-Green Incorruptible,” who became the chief apostle of Rousseau’s cult of virtue: “The secret of the life of a Republic is public and private virtue, that is, integrity, the consciousness of duty, the spirit of self-sacrifice, submission to the discipline of authority. These are the natural conditions of pure democracy; but in an advanced stage of civilisation they are difficult to maintain without the restraint of belief in God, in eternal life, in government by Providence. Society will be divided by passion and interest, unless it is reconciled and controlled by that which is the universal foundation of religions. By this appeal to a higher power, Robespierre hoped to strengthen the State at home and abroad” (*French Revolution* 286). Acton was here patiently unpacking what Carlyle had condensed and compressed in phosphorescent tropes.

Elsewhere in the lectures Acton tried his hand at poetic rendition. Owen

Chadwick rightly commends his description of the Flight to Varennes: “Colourless? He had the sense that history is a drama. His account of the flight . . . is narrative history in the most gripping form.” It is also highly Carlylean, resonating with a feeling of electric intensity and immediacy. Like Carlyle, he conjures up the patriotism and the paranoia of the ordinary populace, as well as the complacency and the torpidity of Louis XVI and his entourage. Remarks Acton, “The men of St. Ménehould who resolved to prevent his escape acted on vague suspicion, but we cannot say that, as Frenchmen, they acted wrongly.” Throughout, Acton follows Carlyle in penetrating the Revolutionary psyche and revealing its innermost operations. He fuses the insights of a story-teller and novelist, as well as historian, emulating a practice that he revered in the novels of George Eliot, herself a champion of Carlyle’s historical verisimilitude. Writing to Mary Gladstone in 1881, Acton commended Eliot’s powers of conjuration: “[She] seemed to me capable not only of reading the diverse hearts of men, but of creeping into their skin, watching the world through their eyes, feeling their latent background of religion, discerning theory and habit, influences of thought and knowledge, of life and of descent, and having obtained this experience, recovering her independence, stripping off the borrowed shell, and exposing scientifically and indifferently the soul of a Vestal, a Crusader, an Anabaptist, an Inquisitor, a Dervish, a Nihilist, or a Cavalier without attraction, preference, or caricature” (60–61). It was the same power that Eliot herself had attributed to Carlyle in her famous comments in the *Leader* in 1859, and though Acton was reluctant to acknowledge the lineage, he was a direct descendant in this creative succession.

Acton’s chapter on Frederick the Great in *Lectures on Modern History* indicate how far he had travelled in the direction of his nemesis Carlyle. There is less emphasis on Frederick the Machiavellian schemer, and more on the King as a statesman, soldier, diplomat, and pre-eminently, enlightened despot. Acton labels Frederick “the most consummate practical genius that, in modern times, has inherited a throne” (290) and in a variety of respects, the King emerges as a man who operates as a bridge between the monarchy and democracy. Though Acton will not sanction Frederick’s conquest of Silesia, he does insist that it be considered in the context of the times, where “no accepted code regulated the relations between States.” Questions about the legitimacy of his actions are warranted, Acton conceded, “but if conquest by unprovoked attack was a crime, in the same sense or the same degree as poisoning a man to obtain his property, . . . [then] respect for sovereign authority must be banished from the world.” No consensus had yet been reached about the morality of Frederick’s actions, Acton asserts. But “at that time,”

he maintains, “Frederic was much more widely applauded for his prompt success than detested or despised for his crime” (291). If this does not quite justify Carlyle’s defense of the King’s “desire to make himself a name,” it does at least lend it some historical authority.

In his conclusion to the chapter, Acton lent further weight to Carlyle’s vision of Frederick as the king who “ushered in” the French Revolution. More than any other ruler of his time, the King of Prussia was responsible for initiating what Acton called the age of “Repentance of Monarchy” (*Lectures* 302). It was a period in which the “selfish, oppressive, and cruel became impersonal, philanthropic, and beneficent.” The omnipotent State was now “obliged to take account of public, as distinct from dynastic interests,” and its chief employments were directed towards “the good of the people.” “It was still a despotism,” declared Acton, “but an enlightened despotism” (303). Less skeptical of its aggrandizing motives than he had earlier been, Acton enumerated the positive benefits of this momentous shift in priorities: “There was a serious tendency to increase popular education, to relieve poverty, to multiply hospitals, to promote wealth by the operations of the engineer, to emancipate the serf, to abolish torture, to encourage academies, observatories and the like” (303). Recalling Carlyle’s portrait of the abstemious ruler, Acton pointed out that Frederick “did more work and had fewer pleasures than any [monarch].” He was a philosophical ruler who emancipated the State from the Church, and practiced tolerance as well as preached it. In a final dig at the author of “Jesuitism,” Acton noted that “their best and most determined protector was Frederick the Great” (304).

Though he came close to endorsing Carlyle’s version of Frederick, Acton was not quite prepared to become an apologist. Frederick had his limits, and so too did his biographer, and these needed to be forefronted, especially in the new century. Carlyle had seen further into Frederick’s character than any previous writer, but his blind spots remained as significant as his revelations. For all of his enlightenment, Frederick could not quite fathom that “the time of absolute monarchy, enlightened or unenlightened, was very near its end.” Contrary to what Carlyle espoused, “the great change that came over Europe in [Frederick’s] time did not make for political freedom” (*Lectures* 304). The French Revolution that promised liberty, equality, and fraternity “ended in the wild cry for vengeance and for a passionate appeal to fire and sword”; its progenitors referred to themselves as liberals, yet what Montequieu, Voltaire, Turgot, Rousseau, and Diderot shared in common was “a disregard for liberty” (*French Revolution* 19).



Acton himself had witnessed firsthand in Germany how the legacy of Frederick the Great could be exploited for crude and illiberal political goals. Bismarck's expansion abroad and his unification at home, his *Kulturkampf* and suppression of the Social Democratic Party, his cynical persecution of Jews and Catholics, his protectionism and imperialism—all of these he justified by his Frederickian appeals to the service of Prussia and the greater good of its subjects. But what he admired most about Frederick was his absolutist state, not his corporative blueprint or his enlightenment ideals. What gave Bismarck cover for his own ruthless and often unprincipled consolidation of state power were the arguments of Carlyle, whom he rewarded with the Order of Merit, though he loathed historians in general. Acton could never forgive Carlyle for betraying what was dearest to them both as practicing historians—the spiritual conviction that the study of history “is a most powerful ingredient in the formation of character and the training of talent, and our historical judgments have as much to do with hopes of heaven as public or private conduct” (*Lectures* 8).



## The Carlyles and photography, 1860-1865

Aileen Christianson

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the extent to which both Carlyles took part enthusiastically in the uses of photography in the early to mid-1860s, particularly in the new popular form of cartes-de-visite. There are seven Carlyle photograph albums in the Butler Library, Columbia University.<sup>1</sup> The National Portrait Gallery, London, also holds many of the photographs that were taken of Thomas Carlyle in April 1865 (as well as earlier and later ones) and some of Jane Welsh Carlyle. Concentrating on photographs of Thomas and Jane and of friends obtained in 1862-64 by Jane Welsh Carlyle and Thomas Carlyle, these are placed here in the context of the Carlyles' letters; this helps with precise dating of some and speculative dating of others.

The emphasis throughout is more on the Carlyles' words and on the photographs themselves, than on any overall narrative about the development of photography. But it is useful to contextualise this moment of enthusiasm for the new format in the Carlyles' earlier experience of photography, keenly interested as they were from the start in the new technologies. Thomas Carlyle first exchanged daguerreotypes with Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1846, typically sending grudging comments to Emerson in response: 'A strange moment that, when I look upon your dead shadow again; instead of the living face, which remains unchanged within me' (18 April 1846; *Collected Letters*<sup>2</sup> 20:173). Critical of the medium, 'This poor Shadow . . . [I]t is a bad Photograph; no *eyes* discernible', Thomas requested 'by the earliest opportunity some *living* pictorial sketch . . . from a trustworthy hand' (17 July 1846; *CL* 20:243-44). Another form of early photography, talbotypes, had been patented by Henry Fox Talbot in 1841; by 1852

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle Photograph Albums, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University; it would seem that none of the albums were compiled by Thomas Carlyle (henceforth TC in the footnotes), although he annotated many of them after Jane Welsh Carlyle's death (henceforth JWC in the footnotes). The first album was made up of Robert Tait's photographs, 1854-57, the second, third and fourth were collected mainly by Jane Welsh Carlyle (henceforth JWC in footnotes); albums 5, 6 and 7 were probably compiled by TC's nephew Alexander Carlyle. For a listing of the photographs in the albums, see David Southern, 'The Carlyles' Photograph Albums, Butler Library, Columbia University', *Carlyle Studies Annual*, no. 25 (2009): 151-73.

the process became more available for general use, and the Carlyles' rich friend, Anthony Conyngham Sterling, was amusing himself 'with taking likenesses by that method' (TC-AC, 8 April 1853; *CL* 28:99). He took photographs of people, but also of existing paintings or sketches of his friends. Jane wrote to her friend Mary Russell in Thornhill, Dumfriesshire, about Sterling and his pursuits:

A friend of mine who has a great deal of money, and a great deal of time, and a great deal of 'superfluous activity' has lately provided himself with a photograph apparatus. . . . He now kills his time wholesale in a very agreeable manner making photographs of all his acquaintance and of any portraits which he chooses to multiply—He possesses a very *like*, very sour looking portrait of *me*, by Lawrence<sup>3</sup> . . . . And this Portrait my friend makes at the rate of two copies at least per day for weeks back—every time he comes, he brings me a handful 'to give to my friends'! as *you* belong, I hope, to that category, you will not I hope think me *silly* in sending you a *portrait* of myself, when you were not wishing for it the least in the world— It was the thought 'Ah how pleasant it would have been to send this to Templand' which put it in my head to send it as *near* as it *could* still be sent. I have some thoughts of sending Capt Sterling with his apparatus to Scotland to DO all my friends there. ([24 Feb. 1853], *CL* 28:52-53)

Thomas also sent his brother Alick copies that Sterling made of portraits of himself and of Jane: 'Jane's I do not think nearly so good; but it also a tolerable Likeness, and of course faithful as far as it goes' (8 April 1853; *CL* 28:99). Perhaps Sterling's keenness to photograph Jane in his photographic studio at the bottom of his garden contributed to his wife Charlotte's extreme jealousy of Jane.<sup>4</sup>

By 1855 the Carlyles' friend Robert Scott Tait was using photographic equipment and took several pictures of the oil portrait of Margaret Aitken Carlyle; Thomas, when sending copies to his sister Jean, usefully (for us) explained his understanding of the procedure:

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<sup>2</sup> C. R. Sanders, K. J. Fielding, C. de L. Ryals, Ian Campbell, Aileen Christianson, David Sorensen, senior editors, *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (Duke University Press: Durham, N. Carolina, 1970-2013) vols. 1-41 (continuing); henceforth *CL*.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Laurence; presumably not the rather flattering Laurence crayon sketch of JWC drawn around 1838; see *CL* 9: frontis.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Sterling's photograph albums are in the National Portrait Gallery, London. For reproductions and further discussion, see K. J. Fielding, 'Captain Anthony Sterling's Photograph Album and his relations with Jane Carlyle', *Carlyle Newsletter*, no. 6 (Spring 1985): 42-50.

I had got a Painter here, an obliging little fellow, of the name of *Tait* to take Photographs of my Mother's Portrait;<sup>5</sup>—they take a kind of heavy tracery upon glass, by means of which you can do as many photographs as you like: Tait has diligently tried it, taken half a dozen different “traceries” (*Negatives*, they call them), of which this now sent is one of the best specimens, tho' not the *preferred* one, or absolutely best (as we reckoned it), from which Tait is to do *seven* other Photographs—but the Oil-Picture, he complains, is itself *dim* and bad, unfavourable for a good result by this method. . . . And so this merely comes as a memento in the meanwhile.

*Two* of the Photographs sent me are entirely *unlike*; which is curious, and shews the uncertainty of the art. (23 March 1855; *CL* 29: 276-277)

For all the perceived ‘uncertainty of the art’, between 1854 and 1857 Tait took many photographs of the Carlyles and their friends. He mainly photographed the Carlyles and friends in London, but some were also taken of friends from Scotland who were passing through London, for example, Christian Stirling, sister of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, Dundee.<sup>6</sup> Tait was to spend a large part of 1857-58 painting *A Chelsea Interior*, his joint portrait of Thomas and Jane at home, with Nero the dog on the sofa. The Carlyles would have complained if they had to sit in person all the time, and Tait painted much of it from photographs. Thomas complained to Jane about that process as well: ‘Tait paints incessantly here, and seems to me to make no progress at all. He has brought back his malodorous Photographing Apparatus; was fluffing about, all Saturday with it,—and getting views whh will certainly “please Mrs Carlyle”’ (26 July 1857; *CL* 32: 203-206).<sup>7</sup> With the exhibiting of the completed oil painting at the Royal Academy, May 1858,<sup>8</sup> Tait began the construction of the brand of the intellectual couple at home that persists for the Carlyles to this day.

This brief summary of the Carlyles’ experiences with photography in its earlier, more cumbersome days shows their appreciation of the new medium and

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<sup>5</sup> The oil painting of Margaret Aitken Carlyle is at Carlyle House, Chelsea; see *CL* 13:frontis.

<sup>6</sup> See *CL* 31:186; volume 31 also reproduces photographs by Tait of TC, JWC with Nero the dog, Erasmus Darwin and Tait himself. They are all to be found in the first photograph album of the ‘Thomas Carlyle Photograph Albums,’ Columbia University (see n. 1).

<sup>7</sup> See also K. J. Fielding, ‘Robert Scott Tait: His Portraits and Photographs of the Carlyles in their “A Chelsea Interior”’, *Review of Scottish Culture* 13 (2000–2001):112–16.

<sup>8</sup> *A Chelsea Interior* is in Carlyle House, Chelsea; for a reproduction, see *CL* 33:197; volume 33, covering Aug. 1857-July 1858, contains discussion of the painting of the picture and several reproductions of details of the painting.

the use that they made of photographs to provide links to friends and family at a distance. But it also provides an introduction to the period 1860-1865 when photography suddenly became an accessible medium, with cheap and easily reproducible *memoires* in photographic form, providing a currency that could be exchanged to illustrate friendship. Jane's enthusiastic collecting and exchange of photographs in the first half of the 1860s is a direct expression of the new fashion for photographs in the form of cartes-de-visite. The carte-de-visite process was invented by André-Adolphe-Eugene Disderi in 1854; they were 9 by 6 cm. (4 by 2 ½ ins.), the same size as visiting cards. A single glass plate negative was divided to make ten different exposures which were then printed simultaneously; the new 'multiplying cameras' with many lenses were very efficient at producing the small carte-size photographs. The fashion took off in Britain after John Edward Mayall photographed the royal family at Buckingham Palace and published the images in *The Royal Album* in 1860, with a second set published in September 1861.<sup>9</sup> When Albert died, December 1861, these images presumably tipped from celebrity pictures into mourning mementoes with the public. The introduction of a new technology to the British public was complete and Jane's pursuit of images of herself, Thomas and their friends can be seen as part of a consumer response to the new medium. Albums in which to put the photographs were easily available; Jane bought her first in Regent St., London, in 1861: 'a sensible modest-looking Volume with no botheration of embossing and gilt clasps, but *real* Morocco; and good paper' (*CL* 38:140), and her second in Scotland in 1862, intended for the photographs of 'relations and very old friends' (*CL* 39:41).<sup>10</sup>

In the summer of 1862, on a visit to Mary Russell, Jane was entertained by being photographed by the Thornhill hairdresser, Thomas Douglas. She sent round copies of the result to relatives and Thomas: 'a photograph of my interesting self! taken by a Thornhill Hairdresser! And not so very bad, it strikes me, as photographs go!' ([30 Aug. 1862]; *CL* 38:177). But by September 1862, when Thomas and Jane had been photographed by William Jeffrey, the London photographer, Jane was more critical, writing to Mary Russell (who also had an album to be filled): 'I send you photographs for your Book. One of Mr C, two of myself! Which ought to be better than the Hairdressers being done by the best Photographer in London' ([21 Sept 1862]; *CL* 38:219). TC was lured to the

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<sup>9</sup> See Patrizia di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007) 16.

<sup>10</sup> These are volumes 2 and 3 of the Carlyle photograph albums at Columbia.

London photographer in his week of holiday in September 1862; Jane described the event to Mary Russell:

An immense explosion of photographs has come off in this house! in consequence of Mrs Aitken's indiscretion in lending the print of Mr C to a photographer in Dumfries, who tho 'bound down to take *only six copies*' . . . had nevertheless, as I thought at the time, sent these wretched photographs out in shoals for his own gain! My aunt Grace had seen a great *heap* of them lying on a Booksellers counter in Princes Street! . . . What all my entreaties had not been able to obtain from Mr C—viz that he would go and be photographed by a right man here, was accomplished by his annoyance at being published over the world under so unlike a form. And having decided that last week was to be a holyday, he actually went with me to the best Photographer in London, who had been for years soliciting him to come and be *done*—for *nothing*!— He (the Photographer[]) took a great many different ones, large and small; of which *one* of the large ones satisfied him, and is to be *published* and I think *it* the finest photograph I ever saw. ([21 Sept. 1862]; *CL* 38:219-20)

This quotation illustrates the commercial possibilities of photographing literary celebrity in Victorian times, permitted by the improving technologies of both photography and reproduction. The photographing of Thomas by Jeffrey<sup>11</sup> thus answered the demand for 'good' photographs of a celebrity author. It also illustrated for Mary Russell, with whom Jane had just shared the enjoyment of the more 'provincial' photography experience (for example, the edge of another backdrop showing behind the screen in Douglas's photograph, see 80) Jane's ability to organise Thomas into doing what she (and the photographer) wanted because of his irritation at someone else exploiting his image for financial gain. Jane was quite clear about the commercial advantage to Jeffrey of having good photographs of Thomas, listing this as the reason that he insisted on also photographing her, in the same letter to Mary Russell:

As of course Mr Jeffrey (the photographer) will make *a good thing* of supplying the shops with Mr C; he was very obliging in insisting on *doing me*—who had not laid my account with being *done*; and so, was

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<sup>11</sup> For an example of one of Jeffrey's photographs of TC that is in Carlyle House, London, see *CL* 38: frontis. or *Carlyle Society Papers* n.s. no. 25 (2012-13) 57.



Jane Welsh Carlyle, by Thomas  
Douglas, August 1862  
*Courtesy of the National Trust*

at the same loss for a head-dress—as you were at the Hairdressers! But fortunately Mr Jeffrey’s Aunt [Ellenor Ruding], who assists him, offered me a white lace thing, so like one of my own loose caps; that I put it on without reluctance and the same helpful woman, seeing the black lace I wear around my *neck* lying on the table, snatched it up and suggested I should be done also in that (for headdress).<sup>12</sup> To complete my luck I had on, the day being cold, my last winters gown (from *Madame Elise*); so that I came out a better *figure*, than at the Hairdressers!! Still I have a certain regard for the queer little Thornhill likeness of myself;—not as a likeness—but as a memorial of the three happiest weeks I have lived for a long long time. ([21 Sept. 1862]; 38:220)

The desire for financial gain by a photographer was assumed three years later, when three unauthorised photographs of Jane by John Watkins were displayed in a shop window:

But the greatest testimony to your fame seems to me to be the fact of *my* photograph—the whole *three*, two of them very ugly, (Watkins’s) stuck up in McMichael’s shop window. Did you ever hear anything so preposterous in your *Life*? And what impertinence on the part of Watkins!<sup>13</sup> He must have sent *my three* along with your *nine* to the wholesale man in Soho Square, without leave asked! But it proves the interest or curiosity *you* excite—for being neither a ‘distinguished Authoress’, nor a ‘celebrated murderess’, nor an actress, nor a ‘*Skittles*’, the four classes of women promoted to the shop windows, it can only be as *Mrs* Carlyle that they offer me for sale. (JWC-TC, 30 July 1865; *CL* 42, forthcoming 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> For two examples of Jeffrey’s photographs of JWC, one with the white lace, the other with the black, see *CL* 38:225 and *CL* 39:30; these are in the National Portrait Gallery, London, along with many more examples of his photographs of TC; see <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections>.

<sup>13</sup> John Watkins took several photographs of TC, April 1865; for one example, see *CL* 41:216; none of Watkins’ photographs of JWC have been traced.



Jane accurately interprets her presence in the shop window as being not in her own right, but by virtue of her association with Thomas. Watkins took these photographs of Jane at the same time (April 1865) as he had photographed Thomas. Jane wrote to Watkins, reporting Thomas's favourable response to them:

I should tell you that Mr Carlyle is highly pleased with these photographs of me—declares them to be the only likenesses of me he has ever seen; tho' I have been drawn, and painted, and photographed times without number! / He likes them *all*; but the profile one the best, and full-face one the least. (25 April 1865; *CL* 41:215)

Copies of Watkins' photographs of both of them were sent round enthusiastically to relatives and friends in May 1865.

The way in which the photographs of the Carlyles were usable as a new currency of friendship is clear, copies being sent in exchange for photographs of their friends which Jane then put into her photograph albums. It is possible to date many of these photographs by references in the Carlyles' letters, particularly Jane's, and the reproductions below are each accompanied by the relevant passage from the Carlyles' letters. The formal photographs of the Stanley family by Camille Silvy (1834-1910; *ODNB*), the fashionable photographer, are also dated, at least with the year. His studio kept meticulous records and the albums containing all of the photographs of his fashionable subjects are held in the National Portrait Gallery.

In a clear expression of the spirit of exchange, Jane wrote to Lady Airlie: 'You shall have that photograph back if you insist. But I pray you to leave me them both! I like them so much! You shall have two photographs of Mr C in return' ([12 Oct. 1864]; *CL* 41:70). This is probably the photograph to which Jane refers, with Lady Airlie



Lady Airlie, 1860  
*Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
Library, Columbia University*

(previously Blanche Stanley) photographed in front of a splendidly romanticised, even sublime, Highland backdrop, appropriate for someone who had married into the Scottish aristocracy and who lived in Cortachy Castle, Angus. It was taken by Camille Silvy, and is to be found in volume 3 of Jane's photograph albums; unusually it is missing from Silvy's studio albums in the National Portrait Gallery, although there is a blank with a subheading identifying it. It was Silvy's habit to use the same backdrop for a week or so, and the photographs before and after the blank space where it once was, have the same backdrop,<sup>14</sup> thus dating it in 1860.

Jane wrote to Lady Airlie's mother, Lady Stanley, September 1862, acknowledging receipt of a photograph of one of the daughters, but asking for one of Lady Stanley, quoting Thomas's emphatic opinion: 'it is absurd not to have *Hers*, when you have all the nice *Lassies* and their Father! Tell her never to mind *ugliness* we are all ugly! *some of us* very ugly indeed. So she *must* send her own photograph *to make the Thing complete!*' (25 September [1962]; *CL* 38:223). Lady Stanley sent some for them to choose one; Thomas, Jane told her, liked the one that showed her as '*Very composed and sensible . . . and very well dressed!!*' but Jane bargained for a second photograph: '*I like one of the others better—one that looks as if you had that moment sat down, and would in another moment jump up again! And were keeping yourself still by a strong momentary effort of volition. And weren't the least tightened in your clothes; but could shake them all off, if you like cap and all! That is more like you I think! . . . Can you spare two?*' ([27 Sept. 1862]; *CL*



Lady Stanley, 1862  
*Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
 Library, Columbia University*

<sup>14</sup> My thanks to Constantia Nicolaidis (Photographs Cataloguer, National Portrait Gallery) for this information, and for showing me Silvy's studio albums.



Kate Stanley and her dogs, 1863  
 Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
 Library, Columbia University

may even have been the ‘white dog’ offered by Kate to Jane (and refused) in December 1861, as a replacement for the much lamented Nero (see *CL* 38:23-24).

There is no identifying passage in the letters for this photograph of Kate’s sister, Maude, but it was taken in a sitting with Camille Silvy, 19 March 1861. The Stanley sisters had promised to send Jane some photographs as early as 1860 when Jane wrote that she wanted to ‘have all three in a little screen’ (*CL* 36:226), and clearly

38:224). From the description, the photograph above is almost certainly the photograph that Jane wanted to keep. It shows Lady Stanley sitting on the step of a French window at their country house, Alderley.

This informal photograph of Kate Stanley can be dated by Jane’s letter to Lady Airlie: ‘What a charming photograph that of your Sister and the dogs!’ ([25 Nov. 1863]; *CL* 39:249-50). She had written about the dogs after her visit to Alderley, summer 1860 (*CL* 36:214 and 226], and one of them in this photograph



Maude Stanley, 1861  
 Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
 Library, Columbia University



Kate Stanley, 1861

*Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University*

of young, working class women and, like Kate Stanley, she was a feminist. Camille Silvy also photographed Kate, in 1860, before she became Viscountess Amberley (see above).

A newer friend of Jane's was Caroline Davenport Bromley, and there is a formal photograph of her in the album (see right). The dating of that photograph can be done implicitly through the photograph of her dog, Spark, of which Jane wrote: 'Miss Bromley sent me yesterday morning the photograph of — *Spark!* I cannot say that I think him a fascinating dog;

exchanging photographs with Lady Stanley and her daughters was a normal part of their friendship. Jane wrote in 1864 about three of the four daughters' marriages: 'thrice happy Lady Stanley *three* daughters *Countesses*, (present or future)!' But of Maude, the daughter who did not marry, she wrote in the same letter: 'As in Maud's case—who is really, I think the cleverest and sincerest of the lot' ([20 Sept. 1864]; *CL* 41:38). Maude became a noted philanthropist, particularly involved in the welfare



Caroline Davenport Bromley, 1863

*Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University*



Miss Bromley's dog, Spark, 1863  
 Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
 Library, Columbia University

surroundings, may have been taken in some photographer's studio with an appropriate backdrop;<sup>15</sup> but equally it may have been taken at the Delepinés' home in Acton in the same year that she drove Jane there:

It was a pleasant little excursion, Elise as a woman, with a House and children, is charming. It is a magnificent House, with a dining room about *three* times the size of Wallace Hall [near

nor did he shine in society on his late visit at the Grange; but as *her* dog I am glad to see him—*on paper!*' ([22 Sept. 1863]; *CL* 39:200). Nonetheless, Spark has his place in album 2 alongside Miss Bromley, the Stanleys, Madame Elise and many other friends.

Madame Elise (Elizabeth Delepine), Jane's dressmaker, was married to F. W. Isaacson, silk merchant, and this highly formal photograph, showcasing the skill and richness of Delepine's dress and



Madame Elise, [1864]  
 Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library,  
 Columbia University

<sup>15</sup> TC's writing underneath is more detailed than his usual commentary in the albums, expressing JWC's admiration for Madame Elise.

Closeburn] dining room, and a drawing-room to match. Both rooms fitted up with the same *Artist-genius* she displays in her dresses! It is an old manor House with endless passages and at every turn of the passage there is a Bust—Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Pope, Milton, Locke!! . . . There is an immense garden round the House, with Green Houses, and a great green field beyond the garden with *sheep* in it—*clean sheep!* . . . They all treated ‘*Madame*’ as if she had been a Princess!—a triumph of *Genius!*  
 [[19 Dec. 1864]; *CL* 41:129, 131]

On occasion photographs were used as a means of introduction. In August 1864, Thomas Woolner, the sculptor, sent a photograph of his soon to be wife Alice to Thomas, asking the latter to send it on to Jane in Scotland; she replied: ‘I like the future Mrs Woolner much—and am pleased with his attentions in sending the photograph’ ([18 Aug. 1864]; *CL* 40:192). Woolner’s courting of Alice had been remarked upon astutely by the children of James Anthony Froude (Thomas’s future biographer), their stepmother reported to Woolner: ‘The children returned from their walk yesterday reporting that they had seen “Mr. Woolner walking with a young lady—oh! *so pretty* & we think he must “be beloved to her” (their expression for such matters)—for we passed him quite close & he never saw us!’ (Henrietta Elizabeth Froude to Thomas Woolner, 7 June; quoted *CL* 40:115).

Not all the photographs in the album were of the Carlyles’ relatives or social circle. Jane’s enthusiasm for having photographs also reached her friends’ servants and their new housekeeper (since Nov. 1864), Eliza Warren. Mrs. Warren’s photograph was sent to Mary Russell, as a way of introducing her:

I mean to inclose a Photograph for you to look at, and return. It is—Mrs



Alice Gertrude Waugh, 1864  
 Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
 Library, Columbia University



Eliza Warren, 1865

Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

Warren my ‘Cook and Housekeeper’!!! She is pleasanter looking in real life, and quite as like a gentlewoman. Her mouth in the Photograph is unnaturally *primmed* over those teeth which—she has lost! ([15 May 1865]; *CL* 42, forthcoming 2014)

The photograph was duly returned and placed in volume 4 of the photograph albums, with TC’s very firm ‘our servant’ written underneath.

Mary, a servant at Mary Russell’s house in Thornhill, endeared herself to Jane during summer 1863, when Jane stayed with them for recuperation after her grave illness; along with other kindnesses, Mary would bring Jane new milk to drink. Back in London, Jane asked for a photograph of her. Mary naturally had one taken in her best dress but Jane rejected it:

I don’t like *that* photograph of Mary at all— The crinoline

quite changes her character and makes her a stranger for me— I want the one that is as I have always seen her a sensible girl with *no* crinoline— I would like best if she would get herself done for me as she is on washing mornings—in the little pink bedgown and blue petticoat. I send a shilling (in stamps) for the purpose. ([31 Oct. 1864]; *CL* 41:86)

Thus, what at first appears an unusually ‘authentic’ photograph of a serving girl (see 88), turns out to be a re-construction from Jane’s memory of Mary in the summer, orchestrated by another servant, Catherine: ‘I like Mary in the bedgown much—tell Catherine I am obliged to her for her capital suggestion of the tumbler of milk’ ([17?] Nov. 1864; MS: NLS 608.662A; *CL* 41:98).

The photographs discussed are a small sample of the many others preserved in the Carlyle photograph albums. They may have been mainly Jane’s preoccupation. But, after her death in April 1866, Thomas was to go through



Mary, 1864

*Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript  
Library, Columbia University*

her in the first rush of his grief, May to July 1866, and that is where the detail of his memories of Jane are to be found, along with a foregrounding of his sorrow and his own life. But in his commentary on the photographs we also find his desire to lay claim to special knowledge of Jane and his connection to her. Mainly put together by Jane, with Thomas's contributions of his family's and friends' photographs sent to him, and his later comments on individual photographs of Jane in particular, these Carlyle photograph albums provide a priceless record of the Carlyles' own changing appearance over the years as well as a visual record of their many friends and relatives. But they also provide a fine example of a mid-nineteenth century gathering of photographs; the Carlyles, in this as in so many other ways, are representative of the Victorian age.

the albums annotating many of the photographs (as can be seen in most of the examples above). It was his attempt at memorialising both Jane and her friends, adding his comments as a way of placing and preserving his memories of Jane. At the start of volume two, he wrote: 'These things, I mark, mournfully, as a kind of duty,—this evg Monday 7 Octr 1867—T.C.'; then at the start of volume 3: 'This seems to have been gathered mainly at Haddington (in perhaps 1859);<sup>16</sup> I know few of the figures; mournfully mark this I do (Monday night, 7 Octr 1869)<sup>17</sup> T.C.' This is the time when Thomas, having gathered together Jane's letters, was still going through them, editing them lightly with suggested dates and the insertion of brief comments. He had already been inspired to write his *Reminiscences* of

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<sup>16</sup> TC's speculative date was too early.

<sup>17</sup> TC probably wrote 1869 in error for 1867, writing his comments under the photographs in both albums on the same day, Mon., 7 Oct. 1867; in 1869 Mon. was 4 Oct. and Thurs. 7 Oct. As TC comments, far more of the photographs in volume 3 are unidentified than in volume 2.





## SYLLABUS 2013-14

### CARLYLE SOCIETY: PROGRAMME FOR 2013-14

18 Buccleuch Place, first floor,  
starting at 1415. All welcome.

**NOTE: MEETINGS WILL BE HELD THIS YEAR IN 18 BUCCLEUCH PLACE, FIRST FLOOR, ON SATURDAYS AT 1415 AS BEFORE.**

2013

|             |                     |  |
|-------------|---------------------|--|
| October 12  | David Purdie        | <i>Carlyle's Countryside:<br/>The Literature of the South-West</i>           |
| October 26  | G Currie            | <i>Carlyle and the Utility of Religion</i>                                   |
| November 9  | G Carruthers        | <i>Burns and Carlyle</i>   |
| November 30 | Stephen Hillier     | <i>On Edinburgh Lectures</i>   |
| December 14 | Aileen Christianson | <i>Jane Welsh Carlyle's Last Year</i> followed by<br>AGM and Christmas Party |

2014

|             |                |  |
|-------------|----------------|--|
| January 25  | Stuart Johnson | <i>Republishing Carlyle</i> along with Mary Hollern<br>on <i>John of Cockermouth</i> |
| February 15 | Lindsay Levy   | <i>Cataloguing the Abbotsford Library</i>  |
| March 15    | David Sorensen | <i>Napoleon III</i>  |

Enquiries should be addressed in the first instance to  
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The University of Edinburgh  
David Hume Tower, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JX

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