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The Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics of Thomas Carlyle's
French Revolution

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Abstract

‘The Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics of Carlyle’s *French Revolution*’ examines the work of Thomas Carlyle as a crucial aesthetic intervention in the modern reception of the French Revolution in Europe. It interrogates the prevalent critical constructions of Carlyle’s work and finds them to proceed predominantly from the Whig historical agenda, structured around such key nineteenth-century concepts as utilitarianism and civilisational and moral progress. Within this critical framework, Carlyle’s largely conservative cultural stance and Christian spirituality are hardly allowed any creative potential and, ever since the famous fabrication of James Anthony Froude who depicted Carlyle as ‘a Calvinist without the theology’, they have been perceived as artistically-stunted, irrational, and out of touch with the nineteenth-century political, social and cultural realities. In examining Carlyle’s involvement with German Romanticism on the one hand, and with contemporary British periodical press on the other, this thesis proposes a more comprehensive reading of Carlyle’s politics, aesthetics and spirituality in an attempt to represent his radically open, catholic and indeed cosmopolitan artistic agenda which taps into the Scottish Enlightenment concept of rationality, Calvinist scepticism towards nineteenth-century progressivism and acute perception of evil in this world, and post-Burkean Romantic aesthetics of the sublime. We chart the aesthetic movement from Carlyle’s early dialogue with Schiller and Goethe to ‘The Diamond Necklace’, Carlyle’s first artistic rendition of the French pre-revolutionary scene, delivered as a (Gothic) moral tale and anticipating *The French Revolution* (a historical work that uniquely employs the Gothic genre within historical narrative, arguably unparalleled in British post-Burkean Romanticism). The critical reception of *The French Revolution* in Britain is examined, with special attention paid to the highly unfavourable review by Herman Merivale in *The Edinburgh Review*, in order to challenge the Whig line in Carlylean criticism and to expose the fundamental artistic, political and moral disagreement between Carlyle and Merivale. Carlyle’s Calvinist stance sees both Merivale’s and Thomas Babington Macaulay’s facile exorcism of the categories of good and evil from their historical agendas as irrational given the recent French terror (which, in Carlyle’s reading, released its demons precisely through such a botched ethical deal). Similarly, I highlight Carlyle’s close dialogue with John Stuart Mill both in their correspondence, and in the publications in the *London and Westminster Review*, while I argue that this intellectual exchange is crucial for the

reading of *The French Revolution* as a text challenging Mill's utilitarianism, and written within the institutional framework of the contemporary periodical press. Finally, Carlyle is seen to make capital of the concepts of Gothic and sublime, introduced by Edmund Burke and popularised by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in Britain, by applying them directly to the French mob in search of a new spiritual tongue for his times (a move that even a nineteenth-century radical liberal thinker such as Mill sees as politically, if not artistically, far too subversive and revolutionary). Creative non-conclusiveness and playful deconstruction of the prevalent post-revolutionary narratives of 1789 characterise Carlyle's deeply spiritual and artistically-sophisticated text, which, in an orthodox Christian reading, rejoices in the messy, dark and complex residue of human history, through which Christian providence acts in mysterious and unexpected ways that do not allow for any simple, de-mythologised reading.

Abbreviations

CL: Collected Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh Carlyle.

CME: Critical and Miscellaneous Essays. 4 vols.

FR: The French Revolution. 3 vols.

Works: The Centenary Edition of Carlyle's Works.

Introduction

This thesis aims to examine Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837) as a text which opens a profound artistic, ethical and political debate with French, British and German nineteenth-century cultures. I will seek specifically to regain the artistic potential of Carlyle's Calvinism, which he sees as a valid critical voice to challenge and imaginatively re-examine the contemporary European cultural landscape. The current body of readings of *The French Revolution*, which have been constructed from a predominantly 'Whiggish' perspective, have arguably undersold Carlyle's vision by forcing it into a narrow agenda of Britishness, as well as by rejecting Carlyle's spirituality. In this critical perspective, Carlyle's Calvinist thought, ever since Francis Jeffrey's scoffing dismissal of Carlyle's metaphysics as 'mystical jargon',¹ has been described as politically and artistically stunted, 'unwordly', 'inward-looking', and as a case of 'mystical withdrawal' from this world.² Within the Whig historical narrative, Carlyle's aesthetics have been seen as essentially escapist,³ while both his Calvinism and indebtedness to the Scottish Enlightenment heritage have been essentially dismissed and neglected.⁴ Challenging these readings, this thesis will examine Carlyle's Scottish Calvinist thought together with his post-Burkean Romantic stance in order to claim that, rather than narrowing and disabling Carlyle's perspective on Europe, as it has often been claimed,⁵ they allow a creative and truly cosmopolitan dialogue with the culture of post-revolutionary Europe.

¹ *The Letters of Francis Jeffrey to Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by William Christie (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 21.

² Cf. Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 22, where Rosenberg claims that Carlyle's 'Weighing the claims of the profoundly unworldly Calvinism of Carlyle's youth, which constantly reminded him of the trap set by the secular principalities and powers, against the growing recognition that mystical withdrawal was not possible for him in the face of the 'Hell and Hunger' that called upon him to act, Carlyle could bring himself, as we shall see, only to the borders of the public world, from where he sent forth social and political essays in which public matters are discussed in an essentially private, inward-looking vocabulary.'

³ Compare the readings of Carlyle by John Stuart Mill, as well as by Herman Merivale, which will be examined later in this thesis.

⁴ Although compare Ralph Jessop's valuable studies: Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997); Ralph Jessop, 'Resisting a Dangerous Legacy of the Enlightenment: Carlyle, Hamilton, and James on the Mechanization of the Human Condition', *History of European Ideas*, 39:5 (2012), pp. 631-649.

⁵ Cf. Rosenberg's portrayal of the supposedly claustrophobic, 'private, and inward-looking' focus of Carlyle's writings: 'Significantly, many of his essays on arcane German literature were written in London, whereas his studies of contemporary England were worked out in retreat on a remote farm in Scotland which he himself described as a 'desert.' Rosenberg, p. 22. See also: Charles Frederick Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934).

I will begin by tracing the nineteenth-century origins of some of the prevailing critical constructions of Carlyle. Within the nineteenth-century British Whig discourse of civilisational progress, Carlyle's Scottish Calvinist thought is systematically read as 'an ancient dialect', and a sign of his cultural backwardness. Carlyle's biographer, James Anthony Froude,⁶ is the first to vest his reading of *The French Revolution* in the discourse of theological and cultural fatalism. Froude rightly sees Carlyle's religious views as playing a major role within his reading of the Revolution, but his portrayal of Carlyle's theology is largely an expression of Froude's personal fatalistic creed, as well as the disappointment with his own romantic construction of Carlyle as a theological reformer, capable of initiating a second spiritual Reformation. Froude's somewhat claustrophobic focus on Carlyle's theology (examined primarily through Carlyle's biography rather than through his texts) leads to his presentation of Carlyle as a 'Calvinist without the theology', a tragically doomed hero, unable to free himself from a demonic, and essentially irrational creed.

Froude's reading has proven surprisingly seminal, inspiring critics to portray Carlyle as fatally divided between his supposedly anachronistic religious and cultural stances on the one hand, and the contemporary British and European milieu on the other (a reading reflected in Matthew Arnold's description of Carlyle as a 'moral desperado,'⁷ a paraphrase of Froude). Subsequent criticism has also been deeply troubled by Froude's presentation of Carlyle's artistic incapacity, supposedly rooted in his religious thought. Following this fabrication, Charles Frederick Harrold reads Carlyle's texts as dramatically divided between his flawed theological assumptions and a more culturally-progressive interest in German Romantic philosophy.⁸ Within such a critical landscape, Carlyle's vast, confident and open European vision, sponsored by his translations, historical curiosity and artistic engagement with German and French cultures, have been undervalued and perceived as means of escape from his Scottish cultural and religious background.

Building upon the readings of John Holloway,⁹ who places Carlyle next to John Henry Newman (1801-1890) in an array of the leading nineteenth-century cultural thinkers interested in challenging the utilitarian and materialistic concepts of rationality,

⁶ *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, ed. John Clubbe (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979).

⁷ Cf. David J. DeLaura, 'Arnold and Carlyle' in *PMLA*, 79:104-29 (1964), p. 105.

⁸ Charles Frederick Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934).

⁹ John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage* (New York: W. Norton and Company, 1965).

as well as Terry Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic*,¹⁰ and its development in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker's *Refiguring Revolutions*,¹¹ as well as Stefan Collini's insights,¹² this thesis will argue that Carlyle's artistic vision demands a broad, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary reading. Entering into a deeply political and moral debate with nineteenth-century British and European texts, Carlyle reimagines his cultural milieu in a way which has been undervalued in the nineteenth-century Whig construction of the aesthetic, the ethical and the political as separate and incommensurate discourses.¹³ No such unproblematic separation is possible in Carlyle's Romantic post-Burkean concept of human experience as irreducible to any given political, philosophical or moral theory.

I will examine the reception of *The French Revolution* in the contemporary periodical press, which, I will argue, is one of the main addressees of Carlyle's elitist critique. The aesthetical, political and spiritual discussions staged in these early receptions of *The French Revolution* will provide inroads into Carlyle's interrogation of Friedrich Schiller's aesthetics, which Carlyle examines from a Burkean position. Carlyle's reading of Schiller's concept of the sublime as rooted in the search for a contemporary (Romantic) spiritual idiom, will lead to the presentation of his own anti-utilitarian artistic agenda in 'The Signs of the Times' (1828), followed by 'The Diamond Necklace' (1837), and *The French Revolution*. Whereas traditionally, in line with Froude's reading, these texts have been read within the English Whig historical tradition, my examination of Carlyle's dialogue with Herman Merivale, Francis Jeffrey and Thomas Babington Macaulay will present the post-Burkean British Whigs as the main addressees of Carlyle's political, moral, and cultural critique. Carlyle caricatures Macaulay as 'a spiritual hippopotamus';¹⁴ describes Merivale as a man speaking the idiom of '*platitudo absolue*'¹⁵ ('absolute platitudes', a joke at Merivale's disregard of all absolute values); and portrays Jeffrey as a 'a man whom they have kneaded into the

¹⁰ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990).

¹¹ *Refiguring Revolutions*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹² Stefan Collini, 'From Non-Fiction Prose' to 'Cultural Criticism': Genre and Disciplinarity in Victorian Studies' in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, eds. Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000).

¹³ Cf. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'History' in *Critical and Historical Essays*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1854).

¹⁴ *CL* 26: 273-275.

¹⁵ *CL* 12: 262-265.

shape of an Edinburgh Reviewer, and clothed the soul of in whig formulas.’¹⁶ Carlyle’s ironic depiction of Macaulay as ‘the sublime of Commonplace’¹⁷ is an intended oxymoron, since Carlyle reads the sublime as the idiom of the supernatural, rejected in the Whig historiographic agenda. Carlyle’s mock sublime, modelled on the language of *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, can be read as a direct challenge to the Whig historical model which we will examine in Macaulay’s ‘History’ (1828). Carlyle’s own artistic historiographic agenda spelled out in the ‘Reflections on History’ (1830) posits a symbolic and anagogical reading of history with the aim of creatively rejuvenating and transforming the historical discourse, which in the Whig rendition has become, according to Carlyle, increasingly artistically and spiritually ‘austere’ and culturally ‘frigid’.¹⁸ Carlyle’s own style is indebted to the rhetorical and ideological impetus of the earlier Scottish Covenanting Whig tradition largely discontinued in nineteenth-century Britain and featured in the speeches and writings of such nineteenth-century public figures as Edward Irving (1792-1834) and Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847).

The artistic and political provocation in *The French Revolution* is spelled out in Carlyle’s description of his work as ‘an Epic Poem of the Revolution: an Apotheosis of Sansculottism!’¹⁹ (an accolade which, despite his early political sympathy with France, not even John Stuart Mill was willing to accept). Whereas Mill is more appreciative of the linguistic and generic experimentation of *The French Revolution* than other contemporary reviewers, this can be seen as his deliberate move to avoid a more profound critical engagement with Carlyle’s text on political, philosophical and ethical levels. The dialogue developed in the correspondence and the periodical press between Mill’s and Carlyle’s artistic, political and moral concepts will reveal Carlyle’s resentment at what he sees as Mill’s embracing of the Whig language of progressivism.

The diversity of genres from which Carlyle draws, such as: medieval moral tale, drama, epic poem, Gothic tale, German *Märchen*, Scottish historical novel, millenarian literature, Calvinist sermon, and periodical press will be examined more closely. This ‘impure’ linguistic and generic texture of *The French Revolution*, I will argue, is an expression of Carlyle’s thorough challenge to the deterministic and linearly structured Whig type of historical narrative which, in Carlyle’s view, ignores the richness and

¹⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. by Ian Campbell and K. J. Fielding (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), p. 342.

¹⁷ *CL* 26: 273-275.

¹⁸ *CME*: 2:169.

¹⁹ *CL* 7:301-309.

complexity of human experience. Challenging the utilitarian historical model from a Christian position, Carlyle will be seen to present tense, chaotic imagery, and dramatic dialogue in defence of free will in human history. Simultaneously, Carlyle's belief in the active role of the devil in this world is expressed in his cynical view of the attempts made by the nineteenth-century historians to purify their texts from the moral categories of good and evil.

A closer examination of the British and European debate in which *The French Revolution* engages will reveal Carlyle's bold, culturally-informed and cosmopolitan artistic agenda, sponsored by his Calvinism, German Higher Criticism, Scottish Enlightenment and Burkean aesthetics of the sublime. A critical gap in a holistic examination of the spiritual, aesthetical and political currents of Carlyle's artistic agenda is what this thesis identifies in the existing readings of Carlyle's *oeuvre*. I will attempt to address this critical lacuna by presenting *The French Revolution* as a text which creatively challenges the existing political, theological, philosophical and national accounts of the Revolution, in a reading that is deliberately playful and inconclusive and that envisions historiography as a negotiated discourse between the natural and supernatural,²⁰ political and ethical, aesthetical and ethical, positing all these spheres as part of one human experience. Finally, I will contend that the artistic sophistication of Carlyle's text, expressed in its linguistic and generic experimentation, sponsors a dialogue with the French (and European) culture on a level of engagement which had arguably not been attempted since the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

²⁰ Cf. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, which proposes an extravagant pontifical union between the spiritual and the physical realms, which is never unproblematic (due to the operation of the devil in this world).

Chapter 1: 'Calvinist without the theology': Froude's Construction of Carlyle

In the *Twilight of the Idols* (1889). Friedrich Nietzsche called Carlyle 'an English [*sic*] atheist who makes it a point of honour not to be one' and accused him of a 'constant passionate dishonesty against himself.'¹ For Nietzsche, both Carlyle's life and his philosophy are an example *per se* of the slave morality saturated with resentment and hypocrisy:

Carlyle: a man of strong words and attitudes, a rhetor for *need*, constantly craving for a strong faith and the feeling of his incapacity for it. [...] The craving for a strong faith is no proof of a strong faith, but quite the contrary. If one has such a faith, then one can afford the beautiful luxury of scepticism [...] Carlyle drugs something in himself with the fortissimo of his veneration of men of strong faith and with the rage against the less simple-minded: he *requires* noise. A constant passionate dishonesty against himself – that is his *proprium*; in this respect he is and remains interesting. [...] At bottom, Carlyle is an English atheist who makes it a point of honour not to be one.²

Nietzsche's sharp caricature features as a lasting presence in Carlylean criticism which until today remains strongly dedicated to the biographical examination of the figures of Carlyle and his wife. Nietzsche's satirical depiction of Carlyle's supposed hypocrisy and profound moral dishonesty has since deeply troubled critics, to the point that it has become almost impossible to examine Carlyle's works without answering Nietzsche's construction of Carlyle in some way.³ For example,

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, tr. Walter Kaufman (Penguin: New York, 1982), p. 521.

² *Ibid.*

³ Quoting Nietzsche's portrayal of Carlyle, Harold Bloom presents Carlyle's self-deception as the main characteristic of his thought and blames Carlyle for sowing the seeds for the twentieth-century fascism: 'Carlyle's later decline is prefigured in his characteristic valorization of nature over what Blake had called 'the Human Form Divine.' In his profound anxiety to overturn the empirical view of the cosmos as a vast machine, Carlyle divinized nature and debased man. It is Carlyle, and not his critic Nietzsche, who is the true forerunner of twentieth-century Fascism with its mystical exaltation of the state and its obliteration of compassion and the rights of the individual.' Harold Bloom, *Essayist and Prophet* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), p. 96. Cf. also J. Hillis Miller, "'Hieroglyphical Truth" in *Sartor Resartus*" Carlyle and the Language of Parable', in *Victorian Perspectives, Six Essays*, ed. by John Clubbe, Jerome Meckier (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 1-20; Tom Toremans, 'A Typical Romantic': Carlyle and Coleridge Revisited', *Thomas Green Lecture for the Carlyle Society 2008*. Toremans begins with Nietzsche's portrayal, arguing that Nietzsche's view 'foregrounds a primordial religious condition: Carlyle is a Romantic to the extent that he desperately attempts to articulate a faith that he seems tragically unable to fully acquire. [...] At the core of Carlyle's writing, then, Nietzsche locates a fundamental self-deception that is at the basis of his rhetoric: Carlyle is 'a rhetorician from *necessity*' because he is essentially in denial of an anxiety at the heart of his moralistic enterprise. What is more, this rhetorical noise serves as the basis for an uncritical hero-worship that is to mask an underlying atheism

David Daiches lists a number of paradoxes in Carlyle's writings, among which Carlyle's supposedly paradoxical religious system plays the main role. In what we can see as a paraphrase of Nietzsche, Daiches claims that: '[Carlyle's] own belief was based on a deep emotional revulsion against his own scepticism manifesting itself partly in a vision of a live and numinous universe and partly in a will to be up and doing.'⁴ Similarly, Philip Rosenberg views Carlyle's religion not only as a 'redundancy which we can well afford to ignore', but also specifically as duplicitous:

Certainly the faith in god Carlyle insisted he never lost is not an insignificant part of his belief system. Yet it seems to me so completely artificial, something he vehemently asserted in an attempt to coach it into existence, something he said not because it was true but because he wanted to make it come true.⁵

Dismissing Calvinism is part of Rosenberg's agenda to present Carlyle as a radical Marxist thinker. Carlyle's irrational belief in the 'godly power of nemesis at work' has no more than biographical interest, according to Rosenberg, and owes much to his childhood education and the early influence of his deeply religious mother.⁶ The urgent call for a moral reform in Carlyle's works is read by Rosenberg as an expression of his 'failure to have anything more substantial to offer.'⁷ In essence, Carlyle is a 'historical determinist' who believes in the power of larger historical and social forces to control human behaviour.⁸ From the moment when Carlyle supposedly assumes 'something like pantheism', Rosenberg dispenses altogether with his religious thought.⁹

Similarly, in the chapter 'The Advent of a Prophet' in *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, John D. Rosenberg diagnoses a deep division within Carlyle's psyche:

that Carlyle seems unable to acknowledge.' Toremans, pp. 16-17. Compare also: J. Hillis Miller, "'Hieroglyphical Truth" in *Sartor Resartus*" Carlyle and the Language of Parable' in *Victorian Perspectives, Six Essays*, ed. by John Clubbe, Jerome Meckier (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 1-20, where Miller negotiates Carlyle's position between Nietzsche's view of Carlyle's fundamental dishonesty against himself and Emerson's assurance of Carlyle's honesty. In his deconstructive reading of *Sartor Resartus*, Miller proposes that both of these descriptions are valid ('Carlyle is both, or neither').

⁴ David Daiches, 'Carlyle: The Paradox Reconsidered', *The Thomas Green Lecture*, 6 (Edinburgh: The Carlyle Society, 1981), p. 7.

⁵ Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 48.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142. Rosenberg's disappointment with Carlyle is due to the fact that he is desperately trying to construct him as a radical political thinker with a defined political agenda; Carlyle is in Rosenberg's depiction merely a political radical thwarted in his development: 'his entire development as a political thinker was stunted by the absence from England of either a living radical tradition or a community of radical intellectuals to which he could turn.' *The Seventh Hero*, p. 144.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Carlyle lost his faith in orthodox Christianity and in the literal truth of the Bible. Yet his loss of orthodoxy only intensified the lifelong urgency of his will to believe. In Basil Willey's words, Carlyle is the classic instance of that typical phenomenon of his time, 'the religious temperament severed from religion'.¹⁰

In *Carlyle and Tennyson*, heavily influenced by James Anthony Froude's portrayal of Carlyle, Michael Timko presents Carlyle as a tragically (and almost schizophrenically) divided thinker who is unable to 'answer the riddle of the Sphinx', that is 'the apparently unresolvable conflict between Fact and Spirit, Earth and Sky [...] past and present, order and chaos, labour and idleness [...]'.¹¹ Carlyle's religion is supposedly the focus of his life-long spiritual and intellectual crises, from which he never recovers. In the chapter 'The Carlylean Dilemma: The Riddle of Destiny', Timko locates Carlyle's drama in his 'inability to convince himself and others of his belief in the primacy of either the 'natural' or the 'supernatural.''¹² In a reading that arguably perpetrates some of Carlyle's major fictional myths, Timko sees Carlyle as a figure of Philosopher Teufelsdröckh, then as a fearful answerer of the mythical Sphinx, or as king Midas who is unable to justify his (irrational) creed: 'Carlyle's own position seems to be similar to that of Midas; indeed, everything Carlyle touches turns to physical actuality rather than spiritual idealism.'¹³

Arguably, these portrayals have enjoyed a lasting influence in contemporary criticism because they proceed from a much earlier construction of Carlyle by his first major biographer, James Anthony Froude (1818-1894).¹⁴ Nietzsche's depiction of Carlyle as a tragicomic figure helplessly divided against himself, stems more or less directly from Froude's seminal biography, which most probably served as Nietzsche's main source of reference. Nietzsche begins his discussion of Carlyle with the acknowledgment of his critical debt: 'I have been reading the life of Thomas Carlyle, this unconscious and involuntary farce, this heroic-moralistic interpretation of dyspeptic

¹⁰ John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 8.

¹¹ Michael Timko, 'The Carlylean Dilemma: The Riddle of Destiny' in *Carlyle and Tennyson* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1988) pp. 43-54 (p. 47).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³ Timko, p. 47.

¹⁴ There were some biographies published during Carlyle's lifetime, such as Friedrich Althaus's work published in 1866 and republished in *Two Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle*, John Clubbe (ed.) (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974). However, Froude's work is recognised as the most acclaimed and influential one.

states.’¹⁵ If we are to follow the general critical agreement that Nietzsche is here referring to Froude’s biography,¹⁶ then, rather than a comment directly on Carlyle, Nietzsche’s satire can be read as aimed primarily at Froude’s ‘heroic-moralistic’ narrative. Nietzsche’s depiction of Carlyle’s religion as an expression of his *slave morality* is in line with Froude’s attempt at a psychoanalysis of Carlyle, whereby he reads his religion as an expression of what Freud would later classify an Oedipus complex towards his deeply religious mother.¹⁷ Froude also frequently reprimands Carlyle for being childish and dishonest with himself.¹⁸ Specifically, Carlyle’s marriage, according to Froude, is a form of self-deception, whereby Carlyle religiously sublimates the neglect of Jane:

The chorus would remark, perhaps, on the subtle forms of self-deception to which the human heart is liable, of the momentous nature of marriage, and how men and women plunge heedlessly into the net, thinking only of the satisfaction of their own immediate wishes.¹⁹

Froude’s captivating portrayal of Carlyle as a self-deluded misanthrope, and a doomed Romantic genius vainly struggling with the Calvinist demons of his childhood (which end up by overpowering him) has been a recurring ghostly-presence which has tainted not only the biographical studies of Carlyle, but also specifically the critical readings of his thought with an undue pessimism.²⁰ Froude’s most famous construction of Carlyle as a ‘Calvinist without the theology,’ a phrase which has since become the largely unchallenged cliché for Carlylean criticism, carries the paradoxical connotations which

¹⁵ Nietzsche, p. 521.

¹⁶ Cf. for example J. Hillis Miller, pp. 1-20.

¹⁷ ‘Carlyle worry comes back on me sometimes. What, in the name of truth, ought I to have done? It was a tragedy, as truly and as terribly as Oedipus; nor was the character altogether unlike [...] Was I to hide all this when he had prepared his own indictment?’ Quoted in: Ciaran Brady, *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 387.

¹⁸ ‘These were times when Carlyle was like a child, and like a very naughty one [...] It was not easy to live with a husband subject to strange fits of passion and depression, often as unreasonable as a child [...] With all his splendid gifts, moral and intellectual, Carlyle was a like a wayward child—a child in willfulness, a child in the intensity of remorse.’ Quoted in: Brady, p. 369.

¹⁹ James Anthony Froude, *Froude’s Life of Carlyle*, ed. by John Clubbe (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1979), p. 170.

²⁰ Cf. Simon Heffer, *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995); Herbert L. Stewart, ‘Carlyle’s Conception of Religion’, *The American Journal of Theology*, 21:1 (1917), pp. 43-57, which is a defence of Carlyle from Froude’s accusations of disbelief: ‘Carlyle, like the poet [Wordsworth], would rather have been a pagan suckled in a creed outworn than have been brought up in a scientific school which dissolved the divine in mechanical explanations.’ p. 48. Compare also Rosenberg’s unflattering depiction of Carlyle’s religion in *Sartor Resartus*: ‘In passage after passage Carlyle’s Manichean demonology calls attention to the presence of the divine and the diabolical in human affairs. Yet these images can never crystalize into a polarized vision because Carlyle seems unable to tell his demons apart: ‘either diabolical or divine,’ he is likely to say, as though there were only a hairline of difference between them.’ Rosenberg, ‘Carlyle’s Religion’, in *The Seventh Hero*, p. 47.

have been creatively reused in Nietzsche's portrayal of Carlyle. While Froude explicitly claims that Carlyle is a religious reformer and indeed a prophet who exorcises the demons of Calvinism and anticipates the emergence of a new spiritual tongue, the accolade is implicitly suggesting that Carlyle is either unable to fulfil his mission, or that he is hypocritically hiding his true credentials from his followers. Froude's own explanation of 'the Calvinist without the theology' is notoriously elusive:

I have seen him confessing to Irving that he did not believe, as his friend did, in the Christian religion, and that it was vain to hope that he ever would so believe. He tells his mother, and he so continued to tell her as long as she lived, that their belief was essentially the same, although their language was different. Both these statements were true. He was a Calvinist without the theology.²¹

Froude's paradoxical depiction can perhaps be seen primarily as a rhetorical tool used to strike the reader with a sense of mystery and suspense in his biography, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835* (1891). While on the one hand Carlyle is portrayed as a religious reformer opposing the school of Edward Irving and the millenarians, on the other Froude also suggests that the ultimate failure of Carlyle's religious programme stems from his pathological desire to please his fanatical mother. From Froude's depiction Carlyle emerges as a duplicitous, or at least a confused prophet, uncertain of his own convictions. In Froude's own words, his obscure portrayal of Carlyle is designed to give the readers the chance 'to solve Carlyle's mystery', and to decide for themselves (on basis of Froude's helpful evidence) who Carlyle truly is:

If [Carlyle] was wrong, he has misused his powers. The principles of his teaching are false. He has offered himself as a guide upon a road, of which he had no knowledge. [...] If, on the other hand, he has been right [...] then Carlyle, too, will take his place among the inspired seers, and he will shine on, another fixed star in the intellectual sky.²²

However, Froude decision to depict Carlyle's life as a 'Greek tragedy', with a carefully controlled moral commentary delivered through the mouth of the omnipresent Greek chorus persona, transmits the sense of disappointment and Carlyle's failure both as a public and private figure. Although Carlyle merits Froude's praise for his critique of

²¹ James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 2.

²² James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. XVI.

Irvingites and his search for a more rational spiritual stance, yet Froude's summary of Carlyle's position as 'the Calvinist without the theology' can be read as a bitter disappointment at the return of Carlyle's unchanged Calvinistic system of belief. Ultimately, we are being told, Carlyle fails to go beyond his early childhood religion and remains to the end an orthodox Calvinist.

Looking in perspective, Froude's portrayal of Carlyle as a 'Calvinist without the theology' would have been legible within the Whig myth of scientific progress, whereby Scottish culture is presented as backward-looking in clinging to its Calvinist past. Henry Thomas Buckle (1821 – 1862)²³ presents Scotland as paradoxically divided between its dark Calvinistic side and the modern scientific spirit of Britain, from which Scotland appears to be radically estranged. Buckle claims in *On Scotland and the Scotch Intellect* that the civilisational progress and 'the spirit of science'²⁴ is thwarted in Scotland because of the deeply ingrained seeds of Calvinism, which keep it spiritually and mentally in constant limbo between the states of *civilisation* and *barbarism*. According to Buckle, the Scottish Calvinist *mentalité* is directly responsible for holding Scotland mentally in superstition, and for thwarting its intellectual progress. It is presented as the locus of Scotland's fractured and divided self:

A people, in many respects very advanced, and holding upon political subjects enlightened views, do, upon all religious subjects display a littleness of mind, an illiberality of sentiment, a heat of temper, and a love of persecuting others, which shows that the Protestantism of which they boast has done them no good.²⁵

The Scottish Enlightenment is a particularly fraught time in Buckle's narrative because of its 'clergy-like' concern with the categories of first principles and moral sense, which supposedly distracts the philosophers' attention from Scotland's social and economic issues (the only ones that merit historian's attention in Buckle's narrative). Whereas Scottish theology supposedly corrupts all national historical attempts at 'objectivity', Buckle claims that by means of his privileged critical stance (beyond the theological parlance of Calvinism) he is able to map Scottish history 'from an elevation' as a smooth progress of causes and consequences: 'We, who, standing at a distance, can

²³ Henry Thomas Buckle, *On Scotland and the Scotch Intellect*, ed. H. J. Hanham (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

contemplate these matters from an elevation, and see how events pressed on and thickened, cannot mistake the regularity of their sequence.’²⁶

In his biography, Froude can be seen to inhabit Buckle’s myth of Scotland, whereby Carlyle’s helpless struggle with Calvinism compares directly to Scotland’s inability to embark on any tangible intellectual and cultural progress due to its deep-seated Calvinist superstition. A ‘Calvinist without the Theology’ in this reading marks no real *progress*, but rather a *regress* to the point beyond which Carlyle’s thought is apparently unable to proceed. Even though Carlyle appears to have renounced Calvinist theology, he remains, to Froude’s disappointment, a Calvinist.²⁷

It is worth remarking, that unlike in his biography of Carlyle, where we see Froude rehearsing Buckle’s progressivism, his earlier essays engage in open polemic with Buckle.²⁸ Froude’s early readings of Carlyle demonstrate that he was deeply receptive to Carlyle’s critique of the Whig school of historical writing based on the discourse of progress and scientific historicism, which in Auguste Comte’s (1798 – 1857) positivist model aimed to subject historical thought to the law of social evolution (of which the first stage was the theological one, to be eventually overcome by the modern scientific model). In his interpretation of Carlyle’s thought, *History: Its Use and Meaning* (1852),²⁹ Froude enthusiastically proclaims Carlyle the new prophetic writer of the nineteenth century, capable of integrating spiritual insight back into historical writing. He specifically begins by criticising the progressive school of historical thought which he sees as political propaganda parading under the appearance of science. He juxtaposes it with (Carlyle’s) definition of human life as rooted in mystery:

Their [ancient historians’] philosophy, if they had any, was one rather of suspense than of conviction; and in their hands, as in those of Homer or of Shakespeare, human life was an unresolved mystery, yielding many morals; but none which adequately explain it, none which leave upon the mind any certain conviction of its destiny or its nature. In all times and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁷ Compare also Laurence James Saunders’s discussion of the Calvinist temper and its ‘inherent pessimism’ which, according to Saunders, thwarts in Scotland social, political and economic progress. Saunders, *Scottish Democracy 1815-1840: The Social and Intellectual Background* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1950), p. 223.

²⁸ See for example Froude’s paper ‘The Science of History: Paper delivered at the Royal Institution, 5 February 1864’, reprinted in James Anthony Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1990), vol. 1, 1–38 (pp. 7–8). ‘[Buckle] cared little for individuals [...] Great men with him were but larger atoms obeying the same impulses with the rest [...] with them or without them the course of things would have been much the same.’

²⁹ James Anthony Froude, ‘History: Its Use and Meaning’, *Westminster Review*, 62 (October 1854), 420–48.

countries, the great writers of history have been more or less what we now call sceptical. The more they have known of human things, the less certain has everything appeared to them; with the exception of the broad moral laws of right and wrong, they have found no other rules uniformly prevailing.³⁰

We can see here Froude resolutely entering Carlyle's critique of the nineteenth-century historical determinism which sought to determine the laws of historical development by means of analysis of the past events. For Froude (and Carlyle), no such unproblematic reading of history, yielding many morals, is possible. Indeed, Carlyle ridicules all attempts at creating larger patterns of historical development and determining the course of history, whether theological or secular, in 'The Signs of the Times':

At such a period, it was to be expected that the rage of prophecy should be more than usually excited. Accordingly, the Millennarians have come forth on the right hand, and the Millites on the left. The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible, and the Utilitarians from Bentham. The one announces that the last of the seals is to be opened, positively, in the year 1860; and the other assures us that 'the greatest-happiness principle' is to make a heaven of earth, in a still shorter time.³¹

Carlyle's satirical depiction of 'the rage of prophecy' can be seen as the leading theme of his early writings, such as *Sartor* and *The French Revolution*, where all attempts at creating larger explanatory structures of human behaviour are ridiculed. Inhabiting Carlyle's vision of history as located beyond all human calculations, Froude presents himself as a historical 'sceptic' (in the sense of questioning the main current of the nineteenth-century ideology) drawing from the tradition of the best ancient and Christian writers and historians. Froude notices ironically that previous to the nineteenth-century ideology of progress, all attempts to determine the course of history would have been seen as essentially irrational both within Christian and ancient culture. For Homer and ancient writers, Fate would have been responsible for the course of human life; for Christian writers, it would have been God's Providence, which is beyond human understanding (whereas in this early interpretation of Carlyle, Froude assumes Christian perspective, his later decision to depict Carlyle's life as a Greek drama will shift his position closer to the Greek concept of Fate). Whereas Carlyle pokes fun both at the religious (Millenarian) attempts at 'prophetic' readings of history

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

³¹ Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Collected and Republished, Four Volumes in Two*, vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1888), p. 100. (Hereafter this edition will be cited as *CME* followed by the volume number).

(a position he shares with Mill),³² and of the utilitarian (Mill's) philosophical historiography, Froude focuses on the second one. Following Carlyle, Froude calls for scepticism towards all historiography which, by ignoring the supernatural perspective in human life, has rendered historical narrative both incredible and unrealistic. Divorced from spiritual reference, in Froude's account, human action appears to be meaningless:

History had driven away the imagination, and made the supernatural incredible; would it be possible for it to replace what it had destroyed, and reunite them again to reality? Without these, even reality was unreal—for they were part of it, they were its life, its substantial being; and they too by themselves had no abiding endurance.³³

Froude specifically accuses Whig historiography of being unimaginative, fatalistic and poor in artistic expression. The works of Gibbon and Macaulay, Froude believes, present the world unrealistically as 'shadowed over with impenetrable gloom'. Given Froude's own later fatalistic depictions of Carlyle's work, it is noteworthy that here Froude is clearly looking in Carlyle for a novel type of historian who will be able to re-integrate spiritual thought with historical narrative and speak the language of Christian hope:

The best English historians, with the one exception of the writer [Carlyle] whose honoured name we have placed at the head of this article— those most admired and read among us, Gibbon, for instance, and Macaulay—pretend to give us nothing but a picture of human things without God in them, without even the proper dignity of humanity in them; a picture of persons and of actions which leaves our love and hatred unaffected, our admiration without an object, emotion dormant, and imagination dead; such a view of this earth and of the life of man upon it, as, were it to prevail as it is more and more prevailing, and become the dominant spirit of the time, might well indeed make us ask, in the dearth and deadness of all noble and generous feeling, what History had done for us.³⁴

The new spiritual tongue which Froude advocates in his essay, cannot be simply a return to previous forms of human spirituality (writing in the wake of *Past and Present*, Froude may be alluding here to Carlyle's increasing medievalism). Rather, it must answer specifically the spirit of the times: 'the teaching which shall rise us must be of a kind which shall not, as before, appeal to the conscience and the imagination, and to

³² Compare Mill's 'The Spirit of the Age' (1831), a work which drew Carlyle to Mill's writings, and where Mill probably ridicules Edward Irving's 'prophetic writings', such as *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse, Which Relate to These Latter Times, and Until the Second Advent* (Glasgow: Collins, 1828).

³³ Froude, 'History: Its Use and Meaning', p. 445.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

only those, but will satisfy the highest demands of the reasonable soul.’³⁵ The new spirituality which Froude is anticipating (and implicitly already sees developed in Carlyle’s writings) will be rational and in touch with the scientific and philosophical discoveries of the nineteenth century. The new historical writer,

reverently laying hold of the eternal facts of human life, shall enable us to see in them a revelation of the will and nature of the Almighty maker of the world; and on this argument, which cannot lie, shall teach mankind once more to know their God, and feel His living presence among them.³⁶

In the ending of his essay, Froude echoes the last words of Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* with an implicit reference to Carlyle himself as the new spiritual guide for his times: ‘It may be that he is among us at this hour.’³⁷ Ciaran Brady notices that, although published in the wake of *Past and Present*, the portrayal of Carlyle’s innovative historical approach in ‘History: Its Use and Meaning’ is specifically a reaction to Carlyle’s *French Revolution*, always the central text in Froude’s reading.³⁸ Froude’s exalted depiction of the new model of symbolic and mystical historiography can be thus seen as a reference to what Froude reads as Carlyle’s spiritual history in *The French Revolution*:

Then History will no more be the ineffectual thing which now we know it; it will no more be written to furnish politicians with sounding periods, theologians with arguments, philosophy with examples, or the idle multitude with amusement; but in a spirit of reverent desire to know its real meaning — with every highest power of the human soul — with all imagination, to see into the inner heart of things — with all faith, to perceive them in their relation to Him, in whom we live and have our being.³⁹

Froude is clearly influenced by Carlyle’s poetical presentation of human history as the unclear terrain through which ‘the mysterious vestiges of Him’ can be glimpsed (although, the historian’s perspective – or indeed any human perspective, in Carlyle’s broad concept of historiography – is imperfect and confused, and can be perfected, in Carlyle’s anagogical reading, only in eternity.⁴⁰)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

³⁸ Ciaran Brady, *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 214.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *CME* 2: 172-3.

However, this early appreciation has proven much less seminal than Froude's dramatic biography, *The Life of Carlyle* (1882-1884), which focuses rather claustrophobically on Carlyle's private life.⁴¹ What we see in this later construction of Carlyle by Froude is arguably a bitter register of Froude's disappointment with Carlyle's personal life, and specifically, his marriage.⁴² Significantly, when Froude posits himself as a defender of Jane in his biography, his chosen culprit is Carlyle's Calvinism (this is a round-about way of both accusing Carlyle of the failure of his marriage and acquitting him since, as Froude argues, Carlyle's pathological Calvinist psyche diminishes his responsibility). More importantly for our study, Froude applies this model not only to Carlyle's biography but also to his writings. What Froude in his early appreciation of Carlyle's texts considered an innovative and ground breaking approach to the point of hailing Carlyle the best living British historian, he now presents as a disappointing return of Carlyle's destructive and essentially irrational faith which is out-of-touch with reality. Once Carlyle is revealed to be a failed prophet, all Froude's appreciation for his thought is retrospectively withdrawn.

As Ciaran Brady observes, Froude's construction of Carlyle is strongly rooted in the circumstances of its composition.⁴³ Froude's image of Carlyle was shaped through their close friendship in the later part of Carlyle's life, and tightened after the death of Jane Welsh Carlyle in 1866 in the long period of Carlyle's mourning when Froude was one among few friends admitted to share in Carlyle's grief.⁴⁴ The fact that in his *Reminiscences* Carlyle repeatedly accused himself of Jane's unhappiness seems to endow Froude's biography with a sense of tragedy and premonition of the approaching disaster. We see Froude from the first pages positioning himself as Carlyle's first and most dedicated apostle, and an inspired translator of his confused and otherwise apparently unintelligible message for the reader. Brady hints that Carlyle himself designed this role specifically for Froude by first announcing that no biography of him

⁴¹ This from the beginning was one of the main criticisms of Froude's biography. See: *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 183: 'Froude's focus on an unfolding drama of personality, and on the primary relationship of marriage, appeared to many to disregard Carlyle's wider social, intellectual, and family relations. Representatives of these slighted constituencies soon came forward to advance their points of view and to set the record straight.'

⁴² In his dramatic reading of Carlyle's marriage, Froude is arguably under the emotional spell of Carlyle's *Reminiscences* (1881) where Carlyle repeatedly accuses himself of not loving Jane enough and not showing her the love and affection she deserved. Cf. Thomas Carlyle, 'Jane Welsh Carlyle', in *Reminiscences*, ed. by Ian Campbell and K. J. Fielding (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), pp. 34-176.

⁴³ Cf. Brady, 'Writing the (Auto)Biography of Carlyle, 1876-84', in *op. cit.*, pp. 352-389.

⁴⁴ *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, ed. Mark Cumming (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p. 182.

was ever to be written, and then suddenly changing his mind and leaving to Froude a hotchpotch of his papers, letters and other miscellaneous materials with the dramatic order: 'Take them and do what you can with them. All I can say to you is "Burn Freely"'. If you have any affection for me the more you burn the better.'⁴⁵ For all we know, Froude did not burn a single page. Brady remarks:

The commission granted to Froude was therefore an immensely difficult but at the same time an extraordinarily privileged one: to be not simply the guardian of the late great man's reputation, but, far more importantly, his evangelist.⁴⁶

If Froude was indeed initiated into his apostleship by Carlyle himself, he takes the full advantage of his position. The captivating force of Froude's depiction comes directly from his positioning of himself as the voice of infallible authority based on his friendship with Carlyle and his privileged knowledge both of the published and unpublished materials handed to him personally by Carlyle in full trust. In the first pages of his biography Froude proudly brandishes his privileged role as Carlyle's one and only biographer and sets the aura of mystery and suspense, which only he will be able to solve:

Mr. Carlyle expressed a desire in his will that of him no biography should be written. I find the same reluctance in his Journal. No one, he said, was likely to understand a history, the secret of which was unknown to his closest friends. He hoped that his wishes would be respected. [...] In the papers thus in my possession, Carlyle's history, external and spiritual, lay out before me as in a map.⁴⁷

Froude also quotes an extract from Carlyle's journal in order to prove the 'impossibility' of the task granted to him by Carlyle:

I would say to my Biographer, if any fool undertook such a task, 'Forbear, poor fool, let no Life of *me* be written; let me and my bewildered wrestlings lie buried here, and be forgotten swiftly of all the world. If thou write, it will be mere delusions and hallucinations. The confused world never understood nor will understand me and my poor affairs. Not even the persons nearest to me could guess at them; – nor was it found indispensable; nor is it now (for any but an idle purpose) profitable, were it even possible. Silence, and go thy ways elsewhere.'⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Brady, p. 358.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁴⁷ 'Introduction', in *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, p. 77-79.

⁴⁸ *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, 321.

This presentation of Carlyle's biography serves to add grandeur to Froude's task and to boost his position as the chosen and supposedly only capable writer able to solve the mystery of Carlyle's life, of which even his closest friends were unaware. In his unpublished *Relations with Carlyle* (1903), he writes: 'He never told me in words what this secret was, but I suppose he felt that I should learn it from his papers.'⁴⁹ Froude comments proudly on his privileged position:

Higher confidence was never placed by any man in another. I had not sought it, but I did not refuse to accept it. I felt myself only more strictly bound than men in such circumstances usually are, to discharge the duty which I was undertaking with the fidelity which I knew to be expected from me.⁵⁰

Froude is here perhaps perpetuating Carlyle's own fictional myths by imitating the role of the character of the Editor from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, a dedicated translator, interpreter and researcher who is the only expounder of the foreign thought of the unknown and apparently unseen by anyone German Professor, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. The British Editor goes through the Professor's copious manuscripts in search of the hidden truth about Teufelsdröckh's life.⁵¹ Both Carlyle's fictitious novel and Froude's biography can be seen as indebted to the nineteenth-century 'quest for the historical Jesus' pioneered by Strauss (1808–1874) in his *Life of Jesus* (1835). Froude's narrative reads like a captivating detective story in search of 'the historical Carlyle', delivered by his closest apostle. As in his earlier works, Froude focuses on Carlyle's religion – now no longer a liberating, imaginative and innovative force in Carlyle's writing, but dark and restrictive:

The secret of a man's nature lies in his religion, in what he really believes about this world, and his own place in it. What was Carlyle's religion? I am able to explain it, partly from his conversations with myself, but

⁴⁹ '[Carlyle] had originally intended that no biography of himself should be written. He had said in his journal that there was a secret connected with him unknown to his closest friends, that no one knew, no one would know it, and that without a knowledge of it no true biography of him was possible. He never told me in words what this secret was, but I suppose he felt that I should learn it from his papers.' Froude, *My Relations with Carlyle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) 1903, p. 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁵¹ The confused Editor goes through 'miscellaneous masses of Sheets, and oftener Shreds and Snips, written in Professor Teufelsdröckh's scarce legible *cursiv-schrift*; and treating of all imaginable things under the Zodiac and above it, but of his own personal history only at rare intervals, and then in the most enigmatic manner.' *Sartor Resartus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 59. (Hereafter this edition will be cited as *SR* followed by the page number).

happily not from this source only, into which alien opinions might too probably intrude.⁵²

The proof of the extent to which Froude's depiction of the hidden secret of Carlyle's life (his sexual impotence supposedly connected with his religious puritanism) caught the popular imagination and caused a scandal in the nineteenth century,⁵³ is the number of biographies published in the wake of Froude's portrayal, defending Carlyle's virility and moral uprightness, among which are David Alec Wilson's (1864 — 1933) *Mr Froude and Carlyle* (1898) and his six-volume biography (1923-1934). Henry Larkin's hagiographic *Carlyle and the open secret of his life* (1886) depicts Carlyle as a saintly figure unsuited for the earthly life, whose true secret was supposedly his hidden desire to gain unofficial influence in the Conservative government. Next to the saintly depictions of Carlyle's relationship with his mother (which Larkin feels acutely that he needs to address in the wake of Froude's attack), Larkin's narrative reads like a political suspense story. Carlyle's mission supposedly needs to be kept secret both from his wife and his closest friends alike, and Carlyle is seen using his clandestine contacts, such as Lady Ashburton (whom Froude depicted as Carlyle's platonic lover), in order to pursue his political aspirations.⁵⁴

Whereas Larkin's imaginative plot and his wish to defend Carlyle from Froude's attack is easily appreciated, Froude's own agenda needs to be reassessed. In the chapter 'Writing the (Auto)Biography of Carlyle, 1876–84', Brady to an extent rightly claims that Froude's portrayal can be seen as carefully controlled by Carlyle, and even as Carlyle's 'self-portrait'. Carlyle's close relationship with Froude, his own choice of Froude for his biographer, and, subsequently, his selection of materials together with the directions for his biography, according to Brady, predetermine the close and almost claustrophobic focus on Carlyle's marriage, as well as on his sexual impotence. Carlyle

⁵² Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History*, vol. 1, p. 2.

⁵³ Cf. 'The Froude Controversy', in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 182.

⁵⁴ 'So far as I can weigh the evidence, I should judge that Lady Ashburton [...] had really penetrated the secret of Carlyle's life, so far as his personal aims were concerned; and that, with womanly tact, she had made him feel that whatever she divined was perfectly safe in her keeping. [...] The fact was, that through Lady Ashburton and her influence, especially in her gatherings of the social and intellectual notabilities of the day, he found almost his only means of gaining personal intercourse, on anything like an equal footing with the leading minds and Ruling Powers of the country'. Henry Larkin, *Carlyle and the Open Secret of his Life* (London: Kegan Paul, 1886), p. 299.

himself, Brady argues, presented Froude with direct ‘evidence of his sexual immaturity’ in his letters and journals.⁵⁵

It can indeed be argued that Carlyle is at least partly responsible for Froude’s construction of the portrayal of himself as a Romantic genius, a religious rebel who strives against forces larger than himself and ultimately succumbs to their overwhelming influence, such as featured in the fictitious semi-autobiographical Byronic hero of *Sartor Resartus*, Professor Teufelsdröckh. Yet, the extent to which Froude’s claim that Carlyle ‘has been substantially his own biographer’⁵⁶ is a conscious artistic and rhetorical tool has been under-appreciated. By claiming not only to be speaking in the name of Carlyle, but actually assuming his voice in what he presents as Carlyle’s *autobiography*, Froude gains a seemingly unquestionable authority:

He has been substantially his own biographer. But no one, especially no one of so rugged and angular a character, sees the lights and shadows precisely as others see them. [...] If in this part of my duty I have erred at all I have erred in excess, not in defect.⁵⁷

Froude’s claim to historical ‘objectivity’ inhabits nineteenth-century historicism, such as pioneered by Leopold Ranke (1795-1886). Froude is presenting himself as absolutely truthful to his source materials, while at the same time, he also claims to be reading larger patterns within Carlyle’s life, which Carlyle himself cannot see. This approach clearly departs from his own earlier deconstruction of the objectivity of the authorial voice in the Whig historical model. Particularly, Froude’s earlier stress on the subjectivity of biographical representations clashes with his own authoritative voice in the biography of Carlyle. In ‘History: Its Use and Meaning’ Froude writes:

[N]o one who has attended to the difficulty of arriving at the truth on the simplest matters of common contemporary occurrence, or who has compared the opinion on such matters which he has himself entertained at different periods of his life, can have avoided feeling how hopelessly precarious a material are humanly written histories on which to build a philosophy of life. We could not even write our biographies without lying, as any one of us may prove by writing an account of his own

⁵⁵ Brady, *op. cit.*, p. 361. Brady argues that Carlyle must have been aware of the fact that ‘[q]uestions of sexual continence and incontinence had [...] been a central theme which had engaged Froude in the fictions he had produced more than thirty years earlier’, and therefore Carlyle made a conscious choice of a biographer who could expose his own impotence.

⁵⁶ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History*, vol. 2, pp. 469-470.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 469-470.

childhood twice over, at an interval of years; and contrasting his own two versions of his own actions.⁵⁸

From the first pages, Froude infuses his biography with the spirit of a Greek tragedy of which Carlyle and his wife become the ill-fated heroes.⁵⁹ In Froude's Romantic depiction Carlyle is presented as a Hebrew prophet, a Romantic Ishmael, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Saint John on Patmos, Saint Anthony, the poor Arab, a Bedouin, and Faust.⁶⁰ This imagery gives credit to the idea that Carlyle's life is the playground of forces beyond his control, which supposedly predetermine its tragic course. Carlyle, in Froude's words, was

not meant for happiness, but for other ends; a stern fate which nevertheless in the modern world, as in the ancient, is the portion dealt out to some individuals on whom the heavens have been pleased to set their mark. [...] in Carlyle the sense of having a mission was the growth of the actual presence in him of the necessary powers. [...] He was a vates, a seer.⁶¹

Froude's commentary on Carlyle's life is given by a returning persona of the Greek Chorus which anticipates the impending doom unseen by Carlyle and his wife: 'The functions of a biographer are, like the functions of a Greek chorus, occasionally at the important moments to throw in some moral remarks which seem to fit the situation.'⁶² In this capacity, Froude posits himself as a teacher who offers useful moral lessons and clues on Carlyle's marriage. Discussing Carlyle's marital mistakes, Froude admonished Carlyle, taking the side of Jane: 'Penitence, however, sincere as it might be, was never followed by amendment, even to the very end of his life.'⁶³ Poetically inhabiting the persona of Jane, Froude offers his moral admonitions: '[h]owever deeply [Jane] honoured her chosen husband, she could not hide from herself that he was selfish—

⁵⁸ Froude, 'History: Its Use and Meaning', pp. 421-422. Ironically, ever since Froude, the facile identification of the main hero of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, with Carlyle himself, has become accepted. Cf. for example Philip Rosenberg's claim that: 'In the small details of childhood and education, as well as in the larger narrative of the crisis of faith and the final 'conversion,' there can be no doubt that Teufelsdröckh is Carlyle.' Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ A larger discussion of this theme is contained in John Clubbe's 'Introduction' to *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, (Ohio State University Press) 1979, pp. 4-27.

⁶⁰ *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, p. 11. In all fairness, Carlyle himself was at least partly responsible for perpetuating his legend of a Romantic outcast heroically struggling with his demons. He did it most prominently in his early work, *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), as well as in his correspondence. *Sartor* has been read (also by Carlyle himself) as his semi-fictional biography in which the author's *alter ego* is a German professor Teufelsdröckh, a Byronic rebel and a poetic image of Martin Luther, an inspired prophet and reformer of his age with a (mystical/political) revolutionary agenda.

⁶¹ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, vol. 1, p. 277.

⁶² Froude, *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, p. 170.

⁶³ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, vol. 1, p. 183.

extremely selfish.’⁶⁴ All events in Carlyle’s life are accompanied by Froude’s moralistic commentary and his keen premonition of the imminent tragedy:

The Greek chorus would have shaken its head ominously, and uttered its musical cautions [...] Yet it is perfectly true that Carlyle would have been an unbearable inmate of any house, except his father’s, where his will was not absolute.⁶⁵

The decision to follow the pattern of a Greek tragedy in his biography is heavy in consequences for Froude’s reading of Carlyle’s religious thought. As we have already seen, Froude presents Carlyle’s religion no longer as a positive strand in his thought, but rather as a means of accounting for Carlyle’s sexual and artistic *impotence*. Calvinism is, for Froude, the key to the terrible ‘secret’ of Carlyle’s life, which he claims to be able to decipher for the reader through a creative theological-psychological reading. Froude’s description of Carlyle as a ‘Calvinist without the theology,’ as I have already hinted, in itself suggests Carlyle’s self-contradictory and divided personality. Under this banner Froude is having Carlyle play two roles at the same time. On the one hand, he constructs Carlyle as a radical reformer of Calvinist theology, a new prophet whose mission is to reshape its tenets dramatically; on the other, as Calvinism’s tragic victim, unable to disentangle himself from his received beliefs and forms of thinking, even when explicitly claiming to have rejected them. In the latter reading, Carlyle’s Calvinism can be seen to play the role of the Greek Fate, which shapes his life and from which he is apparently unable to escape (Froude seems oblivious of the fact that he is essentially perpetuating the pattern of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which he explicitly rejects).

In line with the first role, Froude lionises Carlyle as a radical religious leader, comparable to Calvin and Luther, who is capable of reinterpreting Christianity for his times, by re-inscribing it within the rational and Enlightenment tradition. Carlyle is a modern re-interpreter of Calvin:

On the broad facts of the Divine government of the universe he was as well assured as Calvin himself; but he based his faith, not on a supposed revelation, or on fallible human authority. He had sought the evidence for

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁶⁵ Froude, *Froude’s Life of Carlyle*, p.195.

it, where the foundations lie of all other forms of knowledge, in the experienced facts of things interpreted by the intelligence of man.⁶⁶

He is also a Christ-like figure coming not only to reform Christianity but apparently to remodel it completely into ‘something wider, grander, and more glorious’, in Froude’s Romantic vision:

[H]e believed as strongly as any Jewish prophet or Catholic saint in the spiritual truths of religion. The effort of his life was to rescue and reassert those truths which were being dragged down by the weight with which they were encumbered. He explained his meaning by a remarkable illustration. He had not come (so far as he knew his own purpose) to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them, to expand the conception of religion with something wider, grander, and more glorious than the wildest enthusiasm had imagined.⁶⁷

For all these claims of Carlyle’s programme of religious reformation, of opening and liberalising of Calvinism into a much more universal religious stance, in the end, Froude’s reading of Carlyle’s texts follows his portrayal of Carlyle as a tragic figure unable to free himself from his ideological preconceptions. Key to this reading is Froude’s positioning of *The French Revolution* as the main text in Carlyle’s thought. As Brady has insightfully suggested, Carlyle’s masterpiece has been the main text of reference as a challenge against the orthodox historical style, not only for Froude but also for his contemporaries.⁶⁸ However, Froude’s reading of *The French Revolution* in his biography has little to do with his earlier appreciation of the innovative and imaginative potential of Carlyle’s work. Explicitly, Froude is highly impressed with *The French Revolution*, which he reads dramatically (in accordance with his leading theme) as an ‘Aeschylean drama’:

[*The French Revolution*] stands alone in artistic regularity and completeness. [...] It has been called an epic. It is rather an Aeschylean drama composed of facts literally true, in which the Furies are seen once more walking on this prosaic earth and shaking their serpent hair.⁶⁹

The shift from John Stuart Mill’s influential appreciation of *The French Revolution* as an epic poem of the nineteenth century, to that of Greek drama, is heavy in

⁶⁶ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, vol. 2, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ ‘For Froude, as for many others of his generation, Carlyle’s exemplary masterpiece in historical writing as art and as prophecy was *The French Revolution* (1837). Itself a polemic against orthodox history, *The French Revolution* was a radical experiment in historical style.’ Brady, *op. cit.* p. 214.

⁶⁹ Froude, *Froude’s Life of Carlyle*, p. 354.

consequences for Froude's reading. The aim of Carlyle's history is to convey Christian hope and the belief in God's providence to the modern world:

Struggling thus in pain and sorrow, he desired to tell the modern world that, destitute as it and its affairs appeared to be of Divine guidance, God or justice was still in the middle of it, sternly inexorable as ever.⁷⁰

Yet, Carlyle's reading of history, for Froude, is disappointing, implausible, and plainly unimaginative, a fault which he attributes to Carlyle's Calvinist thought. Carlyle's Scottish puritanical *mentalité* supposedly prevents him from reading history faithfully, by imposing grand teleological narratives over his account. Whereas Carlyle, as we have already hinted in 'The Signs of the Times' rejects and gently ridicules Christian historicism, such as instanced in the nineteenth-century millenarian readings of history, Froude reads *The French Revolution* as an example of Carlyle's interpretation of history as divine distribution of punishments and rewards for human actions:

To the Scotch people and the Puritan part of the English, the Jewish history contained a faithful account of the dealings of God with man in all countries and in all ages. As long as men kept God's commandments it was well with them; when they forgot God's commandments and followed after wealth and enjoyment, the wrath of God fell upon them. Commerce, manufacturers, intellectual enlightenment, political liberty, outward pretences of religiosity, all that modern nations mean when they speak of wealth and progress and improvement, were but Moloch or Astarte in a new disguise, and now as then it was impossible to serve God and Baal. In some form or other retribution would come, wherever the hearts of men were set on material prosperity.⁷¹

Although in his earlier writings Froude saw Carlyle as a reactionary figure, a prophet in search of a new spiritual tongue, here he clearly reverses this reading back to the traditional post-revolutionary conservative religious interpretation of the French Revolution as divine retribution upon the French nation, most famously presented in

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329. Compare later readings of Carlyle's Calvinism in *The French Revolution*, which follow Froude's agenda: '[A]s faithlessness broke out and society broke down, the duty of ruling was passed to those unfitted for it, and finally to a mob. Anarchy, which Carlyle regarded as the manifestation of divine punishment, continued more and more violently until (as personified by Danton and Robespierre) exhausted with its own excesses; in the absence of a natural order came, too, rampant injustice.' Simon Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p. 167. And: *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, ed. by James Eglinton and George Harinck; where Mark W. Elliott sees Carlyle's Calvinism as contributing to his perception of the Revolution as divine punishment, as well as to his lack of social perception: 'He clearly anticipated revolution in Britain, before coming to realize that secular education could be as useful a means of social control as religion had been.' 'Revolution, Theology and the Reformed: Learning from History', in *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, ed. by James Eglinton and George Harinck (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 68.

Joseph DeMaistre's *Considérations sur la France* (1796)⁷² and in Britain by Sir Archibald Alison's *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution to the Restoration of the Bourbons* (1833).⁷³ In Scotland, Alexander Keith, a minister in the Church of Scotland in *Signs of the Times* (1832) reads all history as the fulfilment of the divine (anti-Catholic) prophecy and the French Revolution specifically as the divine punishment on Catholics in France,⁷⁴ while in *The last days: a discourse on the evil character of these our times* (1828), Carlyle's close friend, Edward Irving, interprets the French Revolution as a divine punishment on the 'infidels of France.'⁷⁵ We will discuss Carlyle's critique of Christian prophetic historicism more closely in Chapter Four.

Froude's reading of *The French Revolution* also establishes Carlyle as an anti-Enlightenment figure, and a Calvinist fanatic who sees 'wealth and progress and improvement' as 'Moloch or Astarte in a new disguise.'⁷⁶ In Froude's reading, Carlyle speaks distinctly Edward Irving's preaching tongue admonishing France for its Catholic identity:

France was the latest instance of the action of the general law. France of all modern nations had been the greatest sinner, and France had been

⁷² '[M]ankind may be considered as a tree which an invisible hand is continually pruning and which often profits from the operation. It truth the tree may perish if the trunk is cut or if the tree is *overpruned*; but who knows the limits of the human tree? [...] I know well that in all these considerations we are continually troubled by the wearisome sight of the innocent who perish with the guilty. But without becoming deeply involved in this most profound question, we can consider it solely in the light of the age-old dogma that *the innocent suffer for the benefit of the guilty*. [...] There is nothing but violence in the universe; but we are spoiled by a modern philosophy that tells us *all is good*, whereas evil has tainted everything, and in a very real sense, *all is evil* [...]' Joseph De Maistre, *Considerations on France*, ed. and tr. by Richard A. Lebrun (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 28-31.

⁷³ For Carlyle's opinion on Alison compare his letters to Mill: 'I glanced into Alisons [*sic*] Book lying on a Table. He is an Ultra Tory, and therefore cannot understand the French Revolution; otherwise, they say, a man of considerable ability [...]' *CL* 6:368-374. And Carlyle's answer to Mill's review of Alison's *Europe during the French Revolution*: 'I received your Books last Wednesday, together with a great packet from my Brother. The little Paper on Alison was the first thing I fell upon; a thing I read carefully and even twice. There is not a word in it that I do not subscribe to: it is really a decided little utterance, with a quiet emphasis, a conscious incontrovertibility, which (heretic that I am) I rejoice to see growing in you.' *CL* 6:444-450.

⁷⁴ Alexander Keith, *The signs of the times, as denoted by fulfilment of historical predictions* (Edinburgh: William Whyte) 1832. On page 87 Keith writes: 'Whatever may be the variety or discordance of political opinions respecting the French revolution, there cannot be a question or a doubt that it began to take the dominion with irresistible violence out of the hands of the papacy, and that it fell as a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.'

⁷⁵ Edward Irving, *The last days: a discourse on the evil character of these our times, proving them to be the 'perilous times' of the 'last days'* (London: James Nisbet, 1850), p. 482.

⁷⁶ Cf. John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, p. 32: 'For Carlyle, as for Romantics before him, the rationalism of the Enlightenment was a prime symptom of its deluded view of human nature and its denial of history.'

brought to open judgement. She had been offered light at the Reformation, she would not have it, and it had returned upon her as lightning. [...] She had preferred to live for pleasure and intellectual enlightenment, with a sham for a religion, which she maintained and herself disbelieved.⁷⁷

Although Froude explicitly argues that Carlyle rejects miracles in his reformed faith:

He had learnt that effects succeeded causes uniformly and inexorably without intermission or interruption, and that tales of wonder were as little the true accounts of real occurrences as the theory of epicycles was a correct explanation of the movements of the planets.⁷⁸

However, he apparently contradicts himself by claiming that Carlyle constructs *The French Revolution* as the playground of God's absolute rule over human action via the intervention of terrible 'forces in the universe'. In Froude's increasingly conservative tongue, divine intervention is not a proof of the divine care for humanity, but rather a display of God's anger and revenge:

Constitutions, Bills of Rights, and such like were no substitutes for justice, and could not further justice, till men were themselves just. They must *seek first* God's kingdom, they must be loyally obedient to the law which was written in their consciences; or though miracles had ceased, or had never been, there were forces in the universe terrible as the thunders of Sinai or Assyrian armies, which would bring them to their senses or else destroy them. The French Revolution was the last and most signal example of 'God's revenge.'⁷⁹

What we arguably see here is a display of Froude's personal fatalistic system of belief in which 'God's revenge' is the leading motif. Froude's semi-biographical novel, *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), is structured around the idea of divine punishment which reaches the protagonist, Markham Sutherland, after he has been engaged in a spiritual search which led him to question Anglican and Calvinist beliefs. In his development, Sutherland is drawn in turns to the teachings of Carlyle and John Henry Newman (1801-1890), and is supposedly finally saved by Newman's *alter ego*, but immediately succumbs back to his fatalist creed and dies feeling the most miserable of men, wishing he had never been born.⁸⁰ Significantly, *The Nemesis of Faith* expresses Froude's

⁷⁷ Froude, *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, p. 331.

⁷⁸ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, vol. 2, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Froude, *Froude's Life of Carlyle*, p. 330.

⁸⁰ Froude's novel enacts a larger literary rebellion against the moral implications of the Calvinist doctrine. David J. DeLaura notices: '[I]t has recently been shown that the loss of religious faith in such representative early Victorian agnostics as F. W. Newman (John Henry Newman's brother), J. A. Froude [...], and George Eliot was not due, in the first place, to the usually suggested reasons – the rise of

protest against the Calvinist doctrine of Divine retribution and predetermination (which in his biography he assigns to Carlyle's reading of history):

I mean that the largest portion of mankind, these very people who live about us, feel with us, act with us, are our daily companions – the people we meet at dinner or see in the streets, that are linked in with us with innumerable ties of common interest, common sympathy, common occupations – these very people are to be tortured for ever and ever in insuperable agonies. My God! And for what?⁸¹

Carlyle's reaction to *Nemesis*, where Carlyle's thought features such a strong presence, makes one wonder what he would have thought of Froude's biography:

Froude's Book is not, – except for wretched people, strangling in white neckcloths, and Semitic thrums, – worth its paper and ink. What on Earth is the use of a wretched mortal's vomiting up all its interior crudities, dubitations, and spiritual agonising belly-aches, into the view of the Public, and howling tragically, 'See!' Let him, in the Devil's name, pass them, by the downward or other methods, in his own water-closet, and say nothing whatever!⁸²

In the light of *Nemesis*, Froude's 'Calvinist without the theology' ultimately depicts Carlyle on a lost position in the battle with the Calvinist moral code. In Froude's romantic portrayal, Carlyle is a failed reformer, unable to fulfil his mission of rescuing the world (and Froude) from the fatalistic creed of predestination and divine retribution. Specifically in *The French Revolution*, Carlyle fails to answer Froude's passionately articulated call for a merciful, humane God and a catholic and sympathetic church. For Froude then, Carlyle fails not only in his marriage and personal life, but primarily in his role of Froude's spiritual teacher and leader.⁸³ Froude's biography itself, can perhaps be read artistically in this agenda as the Divine nemesis reaching Carlyle, through Froude's iconoclastic biography.

evolutionary theory in geology and biology and the Higher Criticism of the Bible. Instead, in each life the dominant factor was a growing repugnance toward the ethical implications of what each had been taught to believe as essential Christianity' David J. DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 13. Similarly in *Phases of Faith Passages from the History of My Creed* (1850) F. W. Newman (1805-1897), a friend of Carlyle (and younger brother of Cardinal J. H. Newman) traces the development of his faith from Calvinism, through its complete rejection, to undefined theism.

⁸¹ Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith* (London: J. Chapman, 1849). p. 19.

⁸² *CL* 24:13.

⁸³ Froude confesses his devotion to Carlyle: 'From the time I became acquainted with his writings, [I] looked on him as my own guide and master [...] If I wrote anything, I fancied myself writing it to him.' *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, vol. 2, pp. 179-180.

Froude's depiction of Carlyle as an anti-Enlightenment writer and a failed figure, both in his personal life and as a writer, has had a long purchase. Since Froude blamed Calvinism for all Carlyle's misery and confusion, hardly any positive account of Carlyle's spirituality has until today been produced (a critical lacuna already suggested by writers such as Suzy Anger or Barton Swaim).⁸⁴ Much critical energy in the nineteenth century is spent on redeeming Carlyle and his work from Froude's iconoclastic image. One seminal way of doing this is to stress the influence of the German Romantic writers on Carlyle's thought and specifically of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. However, the nemesis of Carlyle's Calvinism is always close at hand and the benign teachings of Goethe soon succumb to Carlyle's dark 'unenlightened' creed. Norwood Young repeats Froude's reading of *The French Revolution*, which stages the reappearance of Carlyle's terrifying Calvinist God as soon as Goethe's *correcting* influence loses its grip upon Carlyle:

He regards that convulsion as a punishment for sin. [...] In every part of the story the reader feels the presence of God and His active control over events. The people are inspired by God to rise against their oppressors and wreak vengeance upon them. [...] The real God of Carlyle, now that Goethe is dead, is a just and jealous God, an inexorable Judge, who punishes the children for the sins of their fathers.⁸⁵

The same argument is repeated in Hill Shine's reading, according to which Carlyle looks in the German writings for a more tolerant religious morality than that sponsored by Scottish Puritanism, a project which ultimately fails with Goethe's death.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Suzy Anger has recently pointed to the lack of a deeper critical study of Carlyle's engagement with Calvinist theology: 'Although virtually every critic concedes the importance of his Calvinism, there has been only a single article devoted to establishing specific Calvinist influences in Carlyle's thought, this by C. F. Harrold in 1936'. Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 182, footnote. In what is intended to be an inroad into a re-examination of Carlyle's theology in a broader perspective, Anger places Carlyle's writings in the context of the nineteenth-century biblical criticism and negotiates the place of Carlyle's thought in between the reflections of Cardinal John Henry Newman and the German school of Higher Criticism, sketching comparisons with twentieth-century hermeneutics. Cf. also Barton Swaim, "'Our own Periodical Pulpit': Thomas Carlyle's Sermons', *Christianity and Literature*, 52:2 (2003), 137-158, and Swaim, *Scottish Men of Letters and the New Public Sphere* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009).

⁸⁵ Norwood Young, *Carlyle: His Rise and Fall* (London: Duckworth, 1927), p. 354.

⁸⁶ 'Poetry, Carlyle insisted, should find its materials in facts rather than in fiction. History the manifestation of the supernatural in the actual, was to serve as exempla to society. Religion, also a highest moral interpretation of the supernatural in the actual, was to provide the highest moral interpretation of these phenomena of life. But that problem of the highest moral interpretation caused him much trouble. It was one aspect of a conflict between two elements in his own nature – a conflict between romantic tolerance and Puritanic intolerance. At the death of Goethe in 1832, the tolerant viewpoint lost perhaps its ablest single supporter in Carlyle's mind.' Hill Shine, *Carlyle's Fusion of Poetry, History, and Religion by 1834* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1938), p. 85.

The champion of the argument which juxtaposes the Calvinist and the German influences in Carlyle's thought is Charles Frederick Harrold. When in the 1830s Harrold attempts a closer critical examination of the Calvinist debt in Carlyle's writings, he does it increasingly from a philosophical rather than a religious stance. Froude originally stripped Carlyle of his theology, but he supposedly left him his religious apparel intact. Yet, if we read Froude's original opposition as poised between religion and theology, in Harrold's interpretation of the 'Calvinist without the theology', Carlyle is left barely with a scant stoic attitude, which Harrold analyses in the context of his philosophical writings. In Harrold's interpretation, what we witness in Carlyle's writings is a battle between his Calvinist fatalistic and outdated philosophy on the one hand, and the more open, modern and life-accepting influence of German mysticism on the other, a battle in which, however, Calvinism always has the last word. Harrold concludes that Carlyle is a rather mediocre critic of German philosophy, who seeks in it only a confirmation of his own Calvinist creed: 'He was obviously not a philosopher but a wanderer among ideas, seeking here and there an echo of his own convictions.'⁸⁷ Because Harrold is set on examining Carlyle's work as an instance of philosophical criticism (rather than an imaginative artistic production), this conclusion is presented as a major flaw in Carlyle's writing. Representative of Harrold's essentially negative reading of Carlyle is his presentation of Carlyle's reaction to Schiller's motto that truth is a process: 'immer wird, nie est' ('is always becoming/always will be, never is'):

Too theistic, even in this early period, for such a view, he oscillated between his Calvinistic conviction of 'original sin,' and his desire to adopt the Goethean optimism toward human nature, the poet's serene acceptance of the world, his belief in the fundamentally divine nature of man. Beneath his intermittent espousal of the Fichtean belief in the moral progress of the world, in the inevitable and divinely decreed development of man to high spiritual attainments by means of man's indwelling divinity, Carlyle never quite lost his ascetic pessimism, the hatred of evil, the need of expiation, of renunciation.⁸⁸

What we can glimpse here is Harrold's own bias towards German Romanticism, which leads him to presenting Carlyle's creed as outmoded. By putting 'the original sin' in inverted commas, Harold clearly suggests that Carlyle's theology has no place within his philosophical study. The original critical pattern set out by Froude is also given a

⁸⁷ Charles Frederick Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 18.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

more definite reading by Harrold. Carlyle is permanently trapped in his *outmoded* and aesthetically-flawed faith which supposedly stops him from embracing the progressive optimism of the German Romantic school. Harrold can be seen here to involuntarily enter Comte's positivist tongue when he depicts Carlyle as torn between the two 'stages' of human progress, while his Calvinist belief prevents him from progressing to the modern secular stage. Harrold leaves no doubt to the reader about which side he personally supports: German philosophy connotes optimism, acceptance and moral progress, by contrast, Carlyle's spirituality is exclusive, out-dated and pessimistic. The two directions which Harrold draws for Carlyle's thought are: the Calvinist utter damnation of humanity and this world on the one hand, and the German mystical divinisation of man and nature on the other. In another passage, Harrold depicts Carlyle wavering between an *optimistic* German pantheism and his old *dark* puritanical theism:

He always wavered between a love of nature as suffused with deity, and a rejection of her as a cloud on the otherwise dazzling face of Truth. In his more optimistic moments, when he felt sure of the nearness of God, he pantheistically praised nature's beauty and justice, and sensed God as resident in all grades of being from 'the seraph [to] the glow-worm.' When, however, he was oppressed by man's short-comings and nature's darkness and blindness, he reverted to his puritan theism, and saw the divine as remote and transcendent.⁸⁹

This sharp division, which we supposedly witness in Carlyle's thought, can be read as both the inheritance of the English Whig-perpetrated narrative of Scotland as self-divided between civilisational progress and its Puritan past that we briefly examined earlier and an expression of Harrold's own anti-Calvinist bias. Carlyle's occasional 'mysticism' (channelling his German Romantic interest) in Harrold's interpretation is the only way to escape his dark theology. It 'shines like a golden gleam through the darker texture of [Carlyle's] Calvinism'.⁹⁰ However, such occasional pearls in Carlyle's thought in no way redeem his fundamentally flawed doctrine. All in all, we are told that Carlyle's 'mysticism' is a disguised failure to grasp German philosophy properly, and an expression of his 'inability to systematize or think through a number of variously related doctrines'.⁹¹ Harrold believes that Carlyle is no mystic, although he may assume a 'mystical tone', and if at all, he is more indebted to the German thinkers and Goethe

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁹⁰ Harrold, 'The Mystical Element in Carlyle (1827-34)', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (May, 1932), 459-475, p. 475.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

than to great German mystical thinkers.⁹² Ultimately, then, similarly to Froude, Harrold is another critic profoundly disappointed with his hero: if Carlyle fails as a critic of German thought, he cannot be seriously considered as a mystic either (which, we are told, are the only two ‘bright’ strands in his otherwise dark and philosophically-misled doctrine).

It is important to note here that whereas Harrold examines the idea of Carlyle’s mysticism in full seriousness, its actual nineteenth-century connotations in the periodical press are far from religious. In fact, in the Whig idiom of Francis Jeffrey (1773 –1850), Carlyle’s Germanism and his ‘mysticism’ function as interchangeable terms, and both are dismissed as the ostensibly stylistic faults in Carlyle’s texts. Froude quotes Jeffrey’s critique of Carlyle’s style: ‘Jeffrey frankly said that he could not set much value on paradoxes and exaggerations, and no man ever did more than Carlyle to obstruct the success of his doctrines by the tone in which he set them forth.’⁹³ In a letter to Carlyle written in 1828 criticising Carlyle’s essay on Burns (1828), Jeffrey describes Carlyle pejoratively as a Germanophile and advises him to avoid his ‘mysticism’, which is an expression of his foreign sympathies. Whereas this appears to be primarily a critique of Carlyle’s style, Jeffrey also advises Carlyle jokingly to abandon the role of ‘the apostle of another reformation’, registering his low opinion about Carlyle’s ‘puritanism’:

I wish there had been less mysticism about it [Carlyle’s essay on Burns] - at least less mystical jargon [...] I am firmly persuaded the great source of your extravagance, and of all that makes your writings intolerable to many - and ridiculous to not a few, is not so much any real peculiarity of opinions as an unlucky ambition to appear more original than you are - or the humbler and still more delusive hope of converting our English intellects to the creed of Germany - and being the apostle of another reformation — I wish to God I could persuade you to fling away these

⁹² Harrold quotes the supposedly mystical elements in Carlyle’s thought: ‘rejection of the understanding as a means of comprehending ultimate truth, in favor of an immediate and intuitive access, his belief in a Godlike ingredient in man, providing a point of common ground between the soul and its Source; his conception of God as nameless and ineffable, his fondness for the imagery of the abyss; his love of silence as both a means of knowing and as a characteristic of deity; his doctrine of nature and man as revelation of a divine force which is both a being and a becoming, both immanent and transcendent; his conviction of the essential oneness of all things; his emphasis on symbols, under the forms of objects, events, language; and his interest in the relation between time and eternity – his longing for an Eternal Here and Now.’ Harrold, ‘The Mystical Element in Carlyle’, p. 473.

⁹³ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, vol. 2, p. 397.

affectations - and be contented to write like your famous countrymen of all ages.⁹⁴

In the idiom of Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review*, 'Germanism' is a term of offence, an expression both of the periodical's anti-Romantic bias and its Whig credentials (Germany being regarded as the philosophical continuator of French radical thought). Significantly, in this half-joking description Jeffrey also links Carlyle's 'German' style to his religious convictions. The new reformation supposedly staged in Carlyle's texts reflects the early Whig reading of the French Revolution as the continuator of tradition rooted in the Reformation and the Glorious Revolution. Jeffrey's cynical and patronising reference to 'another reformation' which Carlyle is inviting via his 'mystical' style shows how far this tongue of description had become an alien presence in the 1820s.⁹⁵ *The Edinburgh Review* will change its line of depicting the Revolution soon in the wake of the July Revolution of 1830, but even then the image of Germany as the hotbed of revolutionary thought propagated by *The Anti-Jacobin Review* will remain strongly present. Not only Carlyle's 'mystical' (Romantic) style but also his 'mystical' (irrational, anti-Whig) political views are, according to Jeffrey, out of touch with reality.

Crucially, also in Harrold's account, Carlyle's style in *The French Revolution* is seen as a distraction that ultimately discredits him as a historian. Harrold begins persuasively by hinting that rather than as a historian, Carlyle should be regarded as an artist at work:

Instead of considering Carlyle as a scientific historian we may more properly regard him as an artist, dealing with reported fact from a confusing number of directions, and handling materials which, however manifestly unreliable they themselves might be, always demanded some degree of accuracy and good faith, and which on the other hand permitted various turns of interpretation, emphasis, perspective, or moral judgment. From a great number of in-coherent and carelessly inaccurate narratives, he attempted to winnow that thing which he revered with his whole soul, the significant human fact.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *The Letters of Francis Jeffrey to Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by William Christie (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 21.

⁹⁵ Compare Carlyle's opinion of Jeffrey: 'Here is a man whom they have kneaded into the shape of an *Edinburgh Reviewer*, and clothed the soul of in whig formulas [...] but he might have been a beautiful Goldoni, too, or something better in that kind, and given us beautiful comedies, and aerial pictures, true and poetic, of Human Life, in a far other way.' Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. by Ian Campbell and K. J. Fielding (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), p. 342.

⁹⁶ Harrold, 'Carlyle's General Method in the French Revolution', *PMLA*, vol. 43, No. 4 (Dec., 1928), 1150-1169 (p. 1150).

However, this initial appreciation of Carlyle as an artist, is contradicted in Harrold's opinion that all in all Carlyle is a second-rate artist in *The French Revolution*, which, apart from Carlyle's theoretical and emphatically not artistic commentary, displays little talent:

Those sections which are not devoted to running commentary on the Revolution, on democracy, or on other problems, are Carlylean renditions of various dull or hopelessly biased accounts, selected for color and drama, arranged according to climax or contrast, and presented so as to secure the result desired, a 'flame-picture.'⁹⁷

The picture emerging from Harrold's study is that of Carlyle failing as a German philosophy interpreter, a mystic, a historian, as well as an artist.' Harrold's major study, *Carlyle and the German Thought* (1934) establishes the critical pattern in which Carlyle's native Scottish thought is contrasted with the influence of German Idealist philosophy.

The critical tradition of presenting Carlyle's vision of history in polarised terms, poised between the Germanic and puritan influences, is more recently found in David Sorensen's 'Carlyle's Method of History in The French Revolution' (echoing Harrold's 'Carlyle's General Method in the French Revolution'). Here too Carlyle's Calvinism is seen as disabling him from embracing Goethe's higher view of history: 'Ironically, Carlyle was re-living the Calvinist paradox that had tormented his father [...]. He wanted to believe with Goethe that men were responsible for shaping the course of history, but his Calvinist sense made him suspicious of their efforts to reform themselves. He rejected determinism in one instance, while he endorsed it in another.'⁹⁸ We see here the repetition of the critical line established by Froude and Harrold. Carlyle's religion is paradoxical (Froude's 'Calvinist without the theology'), it connotes Carlyle's deterministic reading of history, as well as the millenarian belief that the French Revolution heralds the Apocalypse. While Goethe's reading connotes a less deterministic and fatalistic reading of history, which 'answered to Carlyle's deepest

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ David Sorensen's 'Carlyle's Method of History in The French Revolution', in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. by D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 79-89 (p. 84).

yearnings’,⁹⁹ yet, he is unable to accept it and remains torn between the two historical visions.

This division has been recently fundamentally questioned by scholars such as Ralph Jessop¹⁰⁰ and Cairns Craig who have radically shifted the philosophical debate which takes place in Carlyle’s writings back to the Scottish terrain. Craig has contended that German Idealism should not be opposed to Scottish Calvinism because the nineteenth-century thinkers ‘saw themselves not as negating their Scottishness but as recovering an older Scottish sense of religious commitment in a modern philosophical discourse.’¹⁰¹ Craig writes:

For Caird, like Pringle-Pattison, Carlyle’s Germanism was not a betrayal of Scottish traditions, but, rather, the recovery through philosophy and history of the fundamental principles of the reformed tradition.¹⁰²

If this fundamentally Calvinist-rooted debate has been shifted towards other terrains almost to an utter disregard of its origins, it is, in Craig’s contention, because of the English focus of Carlyle’s criticism. In *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* Craig accused literary criticism of presenting Scottish culture as ‘parochial’ and measuring it against the English standard. Carlyle, writing in a very broad cosmopolitan perspective about Germany and France, but from a distinctly Scottish Calvinist standpoint, does not easily fit into such an Anglo-centric critical framework. Craig argues that critics like Raymond Williams have seen English culture as exercising the main influence on Carlyle, while they ignored almost completely the impact of Carlyle’s Calvinist upbringing and the Scottish Enlightenment tradition. He charges Williams with ‘ignoring the cultural interchanges in which a writer like Carlyle was necessarily engaged’.¹⁰³ In Craig’s interpretation, Carlyle’s position as an outsider in the capital gives him the critical advantage over English intellectuals in his censure of

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997); Ralph Jessop, ‘Resisting a Dangerous Legacy of the Enlightenment: Carlyle, Hamilton, and James on the Mechanization of the Human Condition’, *History of European Ideas*.

¹⁰¹ Cairns Craig, *Intending Scotland: Explorations in Scottish Culture Since the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) 2009, p. 92.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* Compare also: Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1769-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2002. Pinkard contends that the philosophy of Kant was seen as not only philosophically but also politically revolutionary. Kant was believed to be a philosophical Jacobin, and he was often compared to Luther and Calvin. Carlyle also compared Goethe to Luther: ‘Be it for good or for evil, there is certainly no German, since the days of Luther, whose life can occupy so large a space in the intellectual history of that people.’ *CME* 1:158.

¹⁰³ Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 21.

the industrial era: 'It was precisely because Carlyle did *not* belong to the core that he could point to the developing tensions of an industrial society.'¹⁰⁴

Similarly, Stefan Collini draws attention to this negative approach specifically in the field of the 'cultural studies' (championed by Raymond Williams). The picture of Carlyle drawn by cultural studies, Collini argues, has been that of a radical manqué or a primitive critic of the bourgeois idea of the society.¹⁰⁵ It has also tended to curtail the breadth of Carlyle's thought by subjecting it completely to the cause of furthering the progress of socialism in Britain. Instead, Collini advocates a much more holistic approach to Carlyle's works, noticing that their broad cross-disciplinary scope of interest demands such an altogether more catholic answer. According to Collini, too much critical attention has been expended in an attempt to 'classify' Carlyle as a philosopher, a political thinker, or a literary critic *per se*, whereas the less-specific application of the nineteenth-century idea of a 'sage' would suit better Carlyle's miscellaneous and cosmopolitan interests. Collini's vision offers a move forward from the conventionally overly pessimistic depictions of the sage of Chelsea as a 'dishonest' Calvinist, not quite a radical political thinker, not quite a Tory/Whig/Liberal, not quite a democrat, not a true mystic, and not nearly a Kantist (or German idealist/transcendentalist).¹⁰⁶

Already in the nineteenth century, Carlyle's 'Calvinism without the theology' increasingly came to be interpreted as Carlyle's complete rejection of Christianity and his adoption either of agnosticism or of the mythological school of literary

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Stefan Collini, 'From Non-Fiction Prose' to 'Cultural Criticism': Genre and Disciplinarity in Victorian Studies' in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, eds. Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), 13-28.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. for example René Wellek, *Confrontations: Studies in the intellectual and literary relations between Germany, England, and the United States during the nineteenth century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) and René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950: The Age of Transition* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966); where he denies Carlyle's writings any artistic quality but sees him as a literary interpreter of the contemporary German literature and philosophy. See also: A. Abbott Ikler, *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith: Carlyle's Literary Vision* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972); and Carlisle Moore, 'Thomas Carlyle and Fiction: 1822-1834', *Nineteenth Century Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1940). Ikler proposes a similar division along Matthew Arnold's classification of the Hebraism and Hellenism. Carlyle's Calvinism, which in Arnold's tongue is an expression of his outdated 'Hebraism,' is responsible for his life-long rejection of fiction and of poetry, the safeguards, in Arnold's thought, of the social progress of 'sweetness and light'. Moore talks about Carlyle's dislike of fiction in terms of his 'belief in God as the divine author of all human and worldly events in history as a divine revelation of this God. Any human being who tried to fabricate imitations of these events was vainly attempting to take God's place—assuming an omniscience that was beyond human attainment.' Moore, p. 176.

interpretation of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892).¹⁰⁷ Notoriously, these readings have focused on Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) and on *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1841), a work which attempts a mythological reading of the world religions as a sequence of man-constructed myths (in the style of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803)). According to Ruth apRoberts in *The Ancient Dialect: Thomas Carlyle and Comparative Religion* Carlyle is a full-fledged Herderian:

Christianity is but a stage of human history, back from which we cannot retrograde but forward from which we are bound to progress in the direction of Carlyle's anticipated 'new evangel.'¹⁰⁸

Conversely, it could be argued that even the *Heroes* are steeped in Carlyle's Calvinist imagery and that other religions are seen as noteworthy in Carlyle's reading only in so far as they reflect the Calvinist ethics, and in particular the devil's irremovable presence in this world (compare, for example, Carlyle's carefully chosen image in the Scandinavian mythology of Thor's wrestling with the giant 'Midgard-snake, the great World-serpent, which, tail in mouth, girds and keeps-up the whole created world; had you torn that up, the world must have rushed to ruin!'¹⁰⁹), while Islam is presented in the context of a distinctly Calvinist reading of the book of Job.¹¹⁰

Also Eloise M. Behnken prioritises Carlyle's theory of the hero while she translates it into the Marxist perspective of the 'divinization of the labour and of the

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Henry Huxley's famous letter from 1863 in which he quotes Carlyle as his spiritual model is one example of this reading: 'And when I look back, what do I find to have been agents of my redemption? The hope of immortality or of future reward? I can honestly say that for fourteen years such a consideration has never entered my head. No, I can tell you exactly what has been at work. *Sartor Resartus* led me to know that a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology'. Quoted after: Ruth apRoberts, *The Ancient Dialect: Thomas Carlyle and Comparative Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ *Works* 5:38.

¹¹⁰ Recently, a form of mythological reading in the German tradition has also been applied specifically to The French Revolution by Mark Cumming in *A Disimprisoned Epic: Form and Vision in Carlyle's 'French Revolution'*. Cumming presents Carlyle's image of history in The French Revolution as a development of successive mythical forms:

'The French Revolution [...] uses a variety of deeply rooted mythic patterns, divorced from their traditional, classical and Judeo-Christian context. [...] the world portrayed is a symbolic one, where the known images the unknown; thus, the principal theme of The French Revolution is the making and unmaking of symbols, or 'Realised Ideals,' that 'grow; and, after long stormy growth, bloom out mature, supreme; then quickly (for the blossom is brief) fall into decay [...]. The mythic patterns of The French Revolution are all predicated on this symbolic universe, where persons, places, and times become endowed with special significance.' Mark Cumming, *A Disimprisoned Epic: Form and Vision in Carlyle's French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 75.

common man.’¹¹¹ In *Thomas Carlyle: The ‘Calvinist Without the Theology’*, explicitly referring to Froude’s reading, Behnken essentially repeats Froude’s appreciation of Carlyle’s religion: ‘The Almighty God of the Calvinist tradition, the God of grace and mercy, has been replaced by an abstract, unfeeling, impersonal destiny in the face of which man is compelled to act heroically or be snuffed out.’¹¹² (Froude’s depiction of the Carlyle’s God is precisely that of an ‘abstract, unfeeling, impersonal destiny’ rather than of a merciful deity, as we have already seen). Yet, Behnken claims, ‘Carlyle is more optimistic about man’s ability to ‘save himself’ than a Calvinist of the sixteenth century would be.’¹¹³ Behnken’s reading rejects Carlyle’s spiritual thought altogether:

[A]ll his energy is directed toward the goal of letting all men live a full, complete human life in a regenerated social system. Heaven simply does not appear in his writings unless he speaks of heaven on earth.¹¹⁴

Crucially, *The French Revolution* is hardly given any critical attention in Behnken’s account. It is mentioned only in passing in so far as Carlyle portrays it as a decidedly ‘positive good’,¹¹⁵ and it poses no direct challenge to Behnken’s reading (as it arguably should).

It is true that later in his life Carlyle succumbs increasingly to the German school of Herder and possibly even denies the existence of the devil (Calvinist *conditio sine qua non*), but, even so, such absolute statements as the following proposed by Ruth apRoberts are difficult to defend:

Carlyle at times when he sounds orthodox, such as when he speaks of God, says he is using the ‘ancient dialect.’ It is his way of saying that he is borrowing the metaphorical mode of the early mythmaker, and that he, Carlyle, does not mean a literal God, though the early man did.¹¹⁶

ApRoberts focuses primarily on *Sartor* and *Heroes* and presents Carlyle primarily as an anti-Enlightenment figure. Eloise M. Behnken contends that:

Carlyle, unlike Arnold, did not spend his time lamenting the fact of God’s absence: instead he took the offensive and tried to re-establish a secure

¹¹¹ Eloise M. Behnken, *Thomas Carlyle ‘Calvinist Without the Theology’* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press) 1978, p. 21.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ ApRoberts, *The Ancient Dialect*, p. 4.

thought-world and a rationale for acting in the face of God's disappearance.¹¹⁷

Such 'progressive' depictions do not match the pronouncements of Carlyle's contemporaries, most prominently of Matthew Arnold himself, who, like Froude, resented Carlyle's persistent Calvinism, and famously called him a 'moral desperado' helplessly entangled in the 'ancient dialect' of his dark creed.¹¹⁸ Paradoxically, the more 'progressivist' Carlyle's thought becomes in the course of his life, the less Benken approves of his personal system of morality. The image of Carlyle in the 1850s which Behnken paints is unflattering:

Carlyle in the 1850s and sixties thinks that there are no genuine poets in his day; that the common people are stupid: God is gone from his world; and everything has been sold to the Devil. [...] Necessity, destiny, and moral law loom large in the writings of later Carlyle; but man's desire to know and to do good is gone.¹¹⁹

Ironically, it appears that by 1850s Carlyle may well have no longer believed in the existence of the devil. In 1851 he writes in a private letter:

indeed I could object much to these old symbols, "Devil" &c, &c, which are far from expressing one's modern notion about the world, and by me are only used because they lie handiest when such unspeakables are to be spoken of at all.¹²⁰

This is already after the publication of *The Latter Day Pamphlets* (1850), where, in an essay on the situation in modern prisons, Carlyle renounces all pity to the prisoners and where his hatred and bodily disgust with them are evident: 'Pity, yes: but pity for the scoundrel-species? For those who will not have pity on themselves, and will force the Universe and the Laws of Nature to have no 'pity on' them? Meseems I could discover fitter objects of pity!'.¹²¹

The chapters which follow will focus on Carlyle's *French Revolution* and his concept of history in the time leading to its publication. Following Kenneth J. Fielding's

¹¹⁷ Behnken, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Compare: Edward Alexander, *Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and the Modern Temper* (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1973), pp. 102-103; and David J. DeLaura, 'Arnold and Carlyle' in *PMLA*, 1:1 (1964), p. 105. Compare also modern biographies of Carlyle referring to Arnold's reading such as Simon Heffer's *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995).

¹¹⁹ Behnken, *op. cit.* p. 90.

¹²⁰ *CL* 26:238-240.

¹²¹ *Works* 20:55.

suggestion that a much closer attention needs to be paid to the specific time and circumstances of the publication of Carlyle's works

[Carlyle's] views changed; he offers a moving target; and if scholars are to continue to discuss Carlyle's beliefs, they need to seek what they were (or what he says they were) at particular times of his life.¹²²

I will trace the development of Carlyle's historical thought against contemporary political and aesthetic theories.

¹²² Kenneth J. Fielding, 'Spiritual Optics' or Carlyle's Gospel: A Revised Version,' in *Literature and Belief*, eds. Paul E. Kerry, Jesse S. Crisler, 25, 219-237 (p. 221).

Chapter 2: 'Aesthetic History': The Critical Reception of *The French Revolution* in the Contemporary Periodical Press

J. A. Froude's construction of Carlyle as bearing an extreme Calvinist mindset, hostile to all artistic expression, has had a surprisingly long purchase, leading to often facile connections between Carlyle's Calvinism and his supposed 'distrust of fiction', some of which we already glimpsed in the previous chapter.¹ This assumption is responsible for the scarcity of studies dedicated to Carlyle's aesthetics.² In the second half of the nineteenth century the image of Carlyle as a figure opposed to aesthetic expression receives further support from the writings of such aesthetic moralists as John Ruskin (1819–1900) and Matthew Arnold (1822–1888). Specifically, Arnold's rejection of Christianity as a valid foundation for his concept of culture apparently puts Carlyle in a lost position as a cultural critic and an artist. Some of the few extended aesthetic examinations of *The French Revolution* include Mary Desaulniers's excellent study of *The French Revolution* as a Gothic tale, *Carlyle And The Economics Of Terror: A Study Of Revisionary Gothicism In 'The French Revolution'*,³ Mark Cumming's *Disimprisoned Epic*,⁴ and Yoon Sun Lee's study of Romantic irony in *Nationalism and*

¹ Cf. A. Abbott Ikler, *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith*, as well as Carlisle Moore, *Thomas Carlyle and Fiction: 1822-1834*. Michael Timko in *Carlyle and Tennyson* argues that 'There was never any question of Carlyle's basic hostility to the Romantics, for his approach to art and poetics, no matter what he might pay lip service to, was one that could in no way embrace the poetics of the Romantics, even granting their own varied views on art and poetry.' Timko, p. 107. George Levine in *The Boundaries of Fiction: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968) posits the already rehearsed opposition between Carlyle's religion and his German studies, and argues that Carlyle's Calvinism makes him distrustful of fiction: 'German writers' reverence for art balanced his natural Calvinist antipathy towards it.' Levine, p. 35. Compare also: Janet Ray Edwards, 'Carlyle and the Fictions of Belief: *Sartor Resartus* to *Past and Present*', in *Carlyle and his Contemporaries*, ed. John Clubbe (Durham, North Carolina, 1976), pp. 91-111. Edwards argues that: 'Carlyle rejected verisimilitude less out of some curious inability to invent realistic detail, which his brilliant powers of observation supply whenever he deems it needed, than from his reluctance to deal in illusion.' p. 92.

² With the possible exception of *Sartor Resartus* which, ever since G.B. Tennyson's ground-breaking study, *Sartor Called Resartus* (1965), has received more critical attention. Cf. G. B. Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). For other studies of Carlyle's style and artistic expression, and his aesthetic theory, compare for instance Jerry A. Dibble, *The Pythia's Drunken Song: Thomas Carlyle's 'Sartor Resartus' and the Style Problem in German Idealist Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978) where Dibble compares Carlyle's style to Kant's sentences which 'roll heavily along like delivery vans.' p. 11; Gerry H. Brookes, *The Rhetorical Form of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Charles Richard Sanders, 'The Byron Closed in *Sartor Resartus*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 3:2 (1964: Winter), 77-108; and Leonard W. Deen, 'Irrational Form in *Sartor Resartus*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 5:3 (1963), 438-451.

³ Mary Desaulniers, *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror: A Study of Revisionary Gothicism in The French Revolution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995).

⁴ Mark Cumming, *A Disimprisoned Epic: Form and Vision in Carlyle's French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle.⁵ However, Forest Pyle's *Ideology of Imagination*, for example, makes no mention of Carlyle except when placing him along Matthew Arnold in an array of Victorian conservatives hostile to Romantic sensibility; while René Wellek argues that, despite what he reads as Carlyle's largely failed attempts to follow German aesthetical theory, Carlyle is no Romantic, due to his *impure* aesthetic expression which ultimately channels his ethical concern (this, in line with Arnold, Wellek sees puritanically as a major *aesthetic flaw* in Carlyle's writings).⁶

A quick review of the 1830s critical reception of *The French Revolution* (something that we will explore more in detail in the following chapters) may give us an idea about the importance of Carlyle's aesthetics to his contemporary readership. It is arguably no coincidence that when John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) lauds Carlyle's work in a review published in 1837, possibly as an act of favour to Carlyle and as a pledge to their already diminishing friendship, he does so by presenting *The French Revolution* as a major poetical experiment, and advises his readers to disregard Carlyle's *political opinions* (although Mill's move is clearly politically motivated, this disjunction of Carlyle's aesthetics from his political and ethical concerns has arguably haunted the reception of Carlyle's text ever since). Carlyle's religion, politics and ethics may all be wrong, Mill suggests in his essay, but his work is aesthetically pleasing, and that is all the reader should be concerned with (we will yet have a closer look at Mill's review in Chapter Seven). This close and apparently disproportionate focus on the style of *The French Revolution* is the hallmark of its contemporary critical reception (although, as we shall see, it often implicitly channels the reviewers' political and moral critique of Carlyle's work). What may give us an idea of the importance with which Carlyle regards his reception in the periodical press (and we should remember that Carlyle's career develops within the institutional framework of the periodical press), is the fact that the 1838 edition of *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834) includes a selection of press reviews hand-picked by Carlyle and reprinted in the preface to the editions of 1838,

⁵ Yoon Sun Lee, *Nationalism and Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). However, Forest Pyle, for example, makes no mention of Carlyle except when placing him along Arnold in an array of Victorian conservatives who are to be contrasted with the Romantic use of imagination. Forest Pyle, *Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 149.

⁶ Cf. Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, and Wellek, *Confrontations*. It has been a common argument in Carlylean criticism that his ethical thought stands in direct opposition to his aesthetics. Compare for example: 'Carlyle's Moral Aesthetic' in Michael Timko, *Carlyle and Tennyson*.

1841, and 1849 in the ‘Testimonies of Authors’.⁷ Rather than a mere critique of the book (which itself resembles a gathering of press clippings selected and commented upon clumsily by an ostentatiously conservative editor), they become integrated into the text, forming part of the on-going dialogue that Carlyle’s text is designed to initiate.

Let us examine some of the earliest reviews of *The French Revolution*. In a review published in May 1837 in the *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres* an anonymous reviewer begins by drawing attention to the *uncanniness* of Carlyle’s oeuvre: ‘Of this strange work we hardly know how to speak.’⁸ This ‘strangeness’ concerns in the first place the revolutionary character of Carlyle’s oeuvre. What we witness in Carlyle’s book, the author insists in the opening paragraph, is not one but in fact three different ‘revolutions’:

He calls his performance ‘The French Revolution;’ but it is more than that: it is a triple revolution:– 1st, allowing the French Revolution itself to be *one*, 2d there is the Revolution of Mr. Carlyle, *two*; and 3d, the Revolution of the English language, *three!*⁹

Whereas it is the third ‘revolution’ that is the focus of the critique that follows, the reader is reminded here that more is at stake than Carlyle’s unorthodox style. In the first place, though, it is the mixed aesthetic reaction that Carlyle’s work supposedly provokes in the reader that is the essence of the book’s perilous revolutionary appeal: ‘To treat it seriously is impracticable; and yet there are portions of it of such an order, that we find it equally impossible to laugh at it.’¹⁰ The author attributes these perplexing and paradoxical feelings in the reader to the German Romantic influence on Carlyle’s writing, stating that: ‘Caricaturing the worst part of the worst German school, Mr. Carlyle out-Richter’s Richter.’¹¹ This is no recommendation given the post-revolutionary conservative suspicion of German Romanticism and its revolutionary sympathies, but rather corroborates the reviewer’s low opinion of the book as ‘altogether revolting to taste and feeling.’¹² *The French Revolution* is ‘revolting’ precisely because it is aesthetically revolutionary, in a political-aesthetic reading in

⁷ Cf. Rodger L. Tarr, ‘Introduction’ in *Sartor Resartus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. ciii. (Hereafter this edition will be cited as *SR* followed by the page number).

⁸ *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle’s Major Works*, ed. by D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 49-50 (p. 49).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

which ‘revolting’ and ‘revolutionary’ become interchangeable terms. It offends the reader’s taste through its (Germanic) extravagant linguistic and rhetorical experimentation:

Classical absurdities; multitudes of new-coined words; and concocted phrases; illustrations which darken, and expositions which perplex; and hundred other bewildering follies crush the sense of this work in every page. It is only a literary curiosity, and a rather tiresome one.¹³

The reviewer’s classical and anti-Romantic bias can be appreciated here. In order to begin to unpack this linguistic argument, we will first have a quick look at the study *Language and Revolution in Burke, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Godwin*, where Jane Hodson argues that, according to the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment stylists, the aim of language is to communicate ideas as clearly as possible. This leads to a distrust of linguistic experimentation in argumentative writing, as well as of rhetorical tropes and figures as being inherently misleading. Hodson points out that Dugald Stewart, a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and mathematician, describes ‘an exuberance of metaphor; as one of the key causes of confusion in language.’¹⁴ A rigorous distinction between prose and poetry is the hallmark of the early critique of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections* for transgressing the demesne of prose by allowing the intrusion of poetical figures in his writing. Among the charges directed against Burke in the contemporary reception of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) were: ‘luxuriancy of imagery’, ‘a frequent use of metaphor’, ‘a quickness of transition’, and ‘a liberty of digressing’.¹⁵ Hodson notices that linguistic experimentation was seen as a fault not only in Burke’s writings, whose creative aesthetics described in the *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) triggered the debate, but was also criticised in the texts of the pro-revolution writers such as Thomas Paine. Hodson quotes Gwyn Williams’s study, which draws attention to the linguistic transformation taking place in the writings of Paine and Cobbett:

Dissidents were trapped within the very words they had to use. If they resorted to the ‘vulgar’, as they often did, they simply validated their own exclusion. William Cobbett’s struggle with ‘grammar’ was an exemplary epic. This was a ‘national language’ which enforced submission and dependency upon most of those who used it. It was what drove Blake to

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴ Jane Hodson, *Language and Revolution in Burke, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Godwin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

denounce ‘mind-forg’d menacles’ and Paine to complain of being ‘immured in the Bastille of a word.’¹⁶

We can see the ideology of civilisational progress reflected in the linguistic theory with the assumption that, with the *progress* of language, the initial poetical qualities of *primitive writings* give way to a style that is progressively devoid of poetical figures, and, as such, regarded as more fit for rational argumentation.¹⁷ Specifically, the sublime style is here perceived as the hallmark of the early primitive writing expressed in the epic genre: ‘John Adams notes that the sublime style is suitable only for subjects which are ‘great and uncommon’, and suggests that it should be used only ‘in tragedy and epic poetry.’’¹⁸ What we begin to glimpse here, then, are the early roots of the aesthetic (and political) originality of Carlyle’s epic presentation of the history of the Revolution (in the 1830s the first French Revolution is far from being regarded with the epic esteem which Carlyle attributes to it).¹⁹ Yet, it would be a mistake to see this linguistic theory in the nineteenth century without its specific conservative political development channelled via the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, to which we will return presently.

Having in mind this Enlightenment debate, let us have a look at what the reviewer in the *Literary Gazette* considers as the major flaw of Carlyle’s text. It is not only the linguistic innovation which is criticised, but also the rhetorical figures that Carlyle uses, and which supposedly confuse the reader as to the authorial ‘intended’ reading. Carlyle’s irony comes under special attack, since it makes it hard for the reviewer to gauge whether ‘the author is in earnest or in jest’:

¹⁶ Hodson, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Compare Carlyle’s letter to Mill in which he presents the Revolution as the most important contemporary event: ‘As for this business of the French Revolution I think you ought to determine on setting forth your ideas and acquisitions in regard to it at more length than you have ever yet done; and that by your first opportunity, with your best deliberation. It is properly the grand work of our era (a most sorrowful, barren and unfruitful work, yet still the work which was laid on us, which we have done, and are doing): in this, in the right understanding of this, is involved all possible knowledge important for us; and yet at the present hour our ignorance of it in England is probably as bad as total (for Error is infinitely worse than Ignorance); and in France itself knowledge seems only just beginning. Understand me all those sectionary tumults, convention-harangues, guillotine holocausts, Brunswick discomfitures; exhaust me the meaning of it! You cannot; for it is a flaming Reality; the depths of Eternity look thro’ the chinks of that so convulsed section of Time;—as thro’ all sections of Time, only to dull eyes not so visibly. To me, it often seems, as if the right History (that impossible thing I mean by History) of the French Revolution were the grand Poem of our Time; as if the man who could write the truth of that, were worth all other writers and singers. If I were spared alive myself, and had means, why might not I too prepare the way for such a thing?’ *CL* 6:444-450.

[W]ith Mr. Carlyle, not only life, but death, is a standing jest; not only murder, but fusillades, nayades [*sic*], and massacres, the merries of jocular descriptions. The very titles of his chapters are like grinning and hideous laughs at mortality and mortal sufferings. Thus, the chapters giving an account of the fall of the Gironde and the Reign of Terror, are headed, 'Culottic and Sansculottic,' 'Growing shrill,' 'Sansculottism accoutred,' 'In death grips,' 'Swords of sharpness,' 'Death,' 'Destruction,' 'Carmagnole complete,' 'Like a thunder-cloud,' 'The gods are a-thirst,' 'Mumbo jumbo,' 'To finish the Terror' go down to 'Grilled Herrings,' and 'The Whiff of Grapeshot.' Surely this is sad trifling with such scenes as those of the French Revolution, and altogether revolting to taste and feeling: but it is the same with the narrative throughout.²⁰

The idea that Carlyle's humour is 'revolting' because it is connected with 'mortality' and 'suffering' implies that the author assumes the readers will be able to recognise and share in Burke's aesthetics of the sublime. Edmund Burke's theory presents death, pain and suffering specifically as the domain of sublime emotions (conductive to a sense of pleasure, which is specifically contrasted with humour). The enumeration of the titles of chapters of *The French Revolution*, which supposedly attest to the rhetorical blurring of the distinction between the sublime and the comical, is presented in order to show the aesthetic *impurity* of Carlyle's text (an impurity which is 'revolting'). According to Burke's own famous aesthetic depiction of the French Revolution as a 'tragicomic scene' in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the main sin of the Revolution as an aesthetic event lies precisely in mixing the category of the sublime with that of cheap farce, of comedy and tragedy, laughter and tears, which then produces an aesthetic (but also moral, since Burke's categories permeate one another) confusion:

Everything seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies. In viewing this monstrous tragicomic scene, the most opposite passions necessarily succeed and sometimes mix with each other in the mind: alternate contempt and indignation, alternate laughter and tears, alternate scorn and horror.²¹

What we may already notice, though, is that Burke's reading functions on many levels and the navigation between them is often far from obvious (something that the review in the *Literary Gazette* perhaps implicitly suggests by claiming the existence of *three* 'revolutions' in Carlyle's text). As a historical event, the French Revolution supposedly

²⁰ *Literary Gazette*, p. 49.

²¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 9.

mixed and blurred the categories envisioned by Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The appropriate aesthetic answer of the author depicting the revolutionary fervour is confusion and disgust, rather than delight (the latter one being the natural answer to experiencing the sublime, according to Burke). Finally, on the level of representation, the writer, following Burke's theory, should supposedly mirror this confusion of the terrible and the ridiculous, of laughter and tears, so as to mediate these feelings to the reader. Within this perspective, we could say that Carlyle's chosen mode of representing the Revolution follows in an orthodox way Burke's aesthetic agenda applied specifically to the Revolution. However, the writer who mirrors the 'tragicomic' French revolutionary aesthetic confusion may be guilty of *perpetuating* it, while explicitly attempting to *counter* it. Whereas the 'tragicomic' mode is the only possible way of depicting the Revolution within Burke's system, it is implicitly also a suspect and, potentially, an *illicit* one.

We can partly ascribe these manifold internal tensions to the political debate which Burke's aesthetic tongue is shown to enact in Tom Furniss's study, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*.²² Richard Price's association of Burke's sublime with the French revolutionaries in his *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789) forces Burke to react by seeking to discredit Price's argument. Whereas initially Burke's aesthetics of the sublime actively help to shape and establish the authority of the middle-class ethos, in the wake of the French Revolution Burke seeks to disassociate the sublime from the French movement, in an attempt to exclude the working classes from his aesthetic deal. As Furniss notices: 'Burke seeks to reinterpret the Revolution as a false sublime, or as an example of the way the sublime in its highest degree can run out of control.'²³ The Revolutionary use of his concept, Burke seeks to demonstrate, is, in Furniss's words, a 'perversion of the sublime.'²⁴ This, as we have already seen, is done primarily through depicting the French sublime as faulty (because it is mixed with the genre of farce and

²² Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 119. Following Richard Price's use of Burke's sublime in his *Discourse on the Love of our Country* 'Burke is driven to refashion his own position by downplaying the radicalism of his aesthetics. Burke seeks to refute any claim that the Revolution might be either sublime or beautiful by attempting to show that it is both barbaric terror and ridiculous bathos, and works instead to convince his readers that the *ancient régime* is the locus of all things sublime and beautiful.' Furniss, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

low comedy), bathetic and repulsive (producing laughter at sublime categories which are supposed to induce horror and delight but never laughter).²⁵

Burke does this [devalue French sublime] by attempting to transvalue the Revolution into a wholly terrible and/or ridiculous event in order to produce either recoil or ironic distance in his more 'sophisticated' readers. To deflect or deflate his readers' tendency to admire the Revolution, Burke would reduce it from the sublime to the ridiculous, from a 'high' to a 'low' dramatic genre.²⁶

However, as Furniss convincingly argues, this strategy is as insecure and volatile as Burke's concept of the sublime in itself. By presenting the 'terrible' side of the Revolution, Burke's aesthetics verge on the ridiculous and even on a voyeuristic sexual joke. This is specifically the case in Burke's depiction of the scene of Marie Antoinette's narrow escape from her oppressors. Burke's description may cause either terror or laughter in the reader who shares Burke's 'chivalric' code of practice. While aiming to present the queen as the bearer of the sublime values, Burke may be in fact implicitly perpetrating a dirty joke on the French royalty:

In the present case, the opposite might occur: a tale intended to produce terror may unexpectedly work as a joke and so produce laughter, pleasure, or delight. Burke's text thus runs a double risk: terror might always have the potential to induce the sublime, while the sublime always involves the risk of operating or being received as a joke.²⁷

The double-edged aspect of Burke's aesthetics is essentially embedded in his concept of the sublime which operates upon the *delightful* experience of terror, while defining itself against its *other* seen as (physically) *distant* from the subject (Burke's chosen metaphor is that of a theatre in which the viewer is defined as the non-involved spectator, rather than as a co-actor in the play). Furniss's political reading proposes that: 'While being in one sense nostalgic for the 'savage', the sublime is a mode by which bourgeois society defines itself through the *exclusion* of the 'barbarous' past.'²⁸ This move is far from unproblematic. On the one hand, Burke's sublime aesthetics are explicitly channelled through the tradition and customs of the country. On the other one,

²⁵ Mary Desaulniers's study, *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror: A Study of Revisionary Gothicism in The French Revolution* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). Desaulniers's reading of the 'Carmagnole as demonic Eucharist' brings us closer to Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque which could perhaps be the best description of Carlyle's masterful use of Burke's categories.

²⁶ Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 124.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

though, via broadening the scope of association of the sublime to the emerging middle classes, he implicitly provides the tools for questioning this tradition, and his aesthetic intervention into the French Revolution paradoxically allows for the construction of a plethora of pro-revolutionary texts in Britain (which draw from his aesthetic agenda). Burke's theory, in other words, provides the means for its own deconstruction.

Given that in Burke's theory imagination and aesthetic feelings are given such a highly privileged role, since the political and moral spheres are not only *protected by*, but also have their *foundation* in the aesthetics of the sublime, the sublime language must not be used beyond its (culturally) established scope of application (as understood by Burke). Burke's agenda of sharply separating the use of the sublime from its association with the Revolution is developed by the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, which, in the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, leads a cultural crusade against 'the sublime effusions of Jacobinism,'²⁹ while insisting on the 'authorised' use of the sublime in connection with established Anglican religion, morality, and constitution:

Our Church most sublime appears now in time,
Though built upon a holy foundation,
By each usurping band all dangers to island,
That declares to destroy our nation.³⁰

The Anti-Jacobin Review also picks upon Burke's argument that aesthetical insight channels our moral and political responses more effectively than intellectual argumentation, which *The Anti-Jacobin* applies to its political propaganda, disallowing any intellectual dispute to contradict its line of political aesthetics. The sublime feeling emerges as the guarantor of the correctness of *The Anti-Jacobin's* political and moral ideology, since, *The Anti-Jacobin* maintains, the true religion is distinguished from false ones by exciting sublime emotions.³¹ At the same time, according to *The Anti-Jacobin*, the sublime is a double-edged sword, being both a suspect tongue that can be used to confuse the reader and a 'useful language' which, when applied in defence of political conservatism and against the revolutionary principles, can safeguard the reader's reverence for the established order:

²⁹ *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (London: J. Plymsell, 1799), p. 324.

³⁰ 'Catholic Advice', *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (London: G. Sidney, 1819), 300-302, p. 300.

³¹ True religion 'must be such as encourages the grateful affections of love, gratitude, admiration, awe, reverence [...]' *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, vol. 29 (London: Knight and Campton, 1808). p. 124.

We may also remark that a declamatory mode of reasoning is always to be suspected. A lively imagination, or an impetuous passion, assiduously collects every specious argument which may be subservient to the object desired, while with equal assiduity it conceals every fact of an opposite tendency. To form a true estimate of high civilisation, compared with the savage state, the advantages and disadvantages of each should be placed before us, and duly appreciated.³²

We can read here *The Anti-Jacobin's* conviction that Rousseau's use of the sublime mode in the image of the 'noble savage' must be resisted and exposed as illegitimate. Carlyle's sublime presentation of the French revolutionaries, as we shall see, is a direct challenge to this agenda. Ultimately, for the *Anti-Jacobin*, the sublime is the *only* criterion for separating the true from the false and the right from the wrong, both in the political and in the moral spheres. The readers are taught to distinguish a true argument from a false one on the basis of their sublime *emotions*. In the 'Ethical Treatise on the Passions', the *Anti-Jacobin* inscribes Burke's thought within the language of utilitarianism and ultra-conservatism:

[P]leasing sensations generally accompany the contemplation of good, and painful ones the contemplation of evil, the universal desire after good induces us to approve of such actions and dispositions as are beneficial, as also to applaud the agent; to condemn whatever is obviously of a pernicious tendency, and to censure the agent, whenever we suppose that he possessed the power of acting otherwise.³³

Mixed with the utilitarian ideology of social usefulness as the ultimate ethical standard, Burke's aesthetics are applied here to support the argument that only those *pleasing* and *good* sensations which are *beneficial* to the society are to be tolerated in the pages of the *Anti-Jacobin*. In order to guarantee this beneficial social effect and confirm the ideology of civilisational progress, which the *Anti-Jacobin* endorses, no risky double-meaning, irony or unclarity (which could unintentionally prove 'pernicious' to the state ideology) is allowed.

Yet, as Ian Haywood has argued, *The Anti-Jacobin's* use of sublime rhetoric is potentially at least as risky as Burke's. Examining Gifford's sketches, Haywood states that: '[Gifford's 'Exhibition of a Democratic Transparency'] subverts the sublime rhetoric of secrecy and revelation upon which the government case for the suppression

³² 'Cogan's *Ethical Treatise on the Passions*', *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (London: Knight and Compton, 1808), 113-125 (p. 123).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

of allegedly traitorous societies was based. By foregrounding the transformation of politics into a popular spectacle or “exhibition,” Gillray’s print exposes the hyperbole, distortion and violent fantasising which underpinned the counter-revolutionary narrative of sinister and organised Jacobin plotting.’³⁴ Placing all its stakes upon sublime aesthetics, the *Anti-Jacobin* risks plunging into self-mockery and alerting its readers to the political masquerade which it endorses.

How far the tone of the *Anti-Jacobin* is still the newspeak of the 1830s can be appreciated from the reception of the *French Revolution* which we have begun to trace. The *Literary Gazette* accuses Carlyle’s work of being not only offensive to the reader’s taste but also plainly ‘unintelligible’:

There is nothing like a history of the events which took place; but, instead, there is a series of rhapsodical snatches, which may remind readers acquainted with the facts, from previous histories and memoirs, what it is that the author is really writing about. By itself, his book is unintelligible.³⁵

This, in one sense, is a natural conclusion following from the supposed aesthetic (‘tragicomic’) impropriety of Carlyle’s work (*The French Revolution* is *aesthetically* unintelligible, because it does not fit easily into Burke’s distinction between the sublime and the beautiful). In the *Anti-Jacobin* agenda of using history as a tool of political propaganda that must fence off all revolutionary talk, ‘unintelligible’ may also be read as ‘barbarous’ and ‘uncivilised’ and, as such, politically and ideologically illicit. However, taken at face value, the critique of the *Literary Gazette* may well pose the question who *The French Revolution*’s intended readership is. Whereas the reviewer appears to assume that it is a badly written historical introduction into the study of the events of 1789, which offers ‘a series of rhapsodical snatches’ instead of a clear and logical argument, Carlyle’s work should arguably be read as a highly sophisticated and provocative artistic intervention into the aesthetic construction of the Revolution within the periodical press (something that we will yet develop in the following chapters). The main addressee of Carlyle’s irony and his Burkean provocation in such a reading is precisely the British press, which Carlyle invites to re-think the French Revolution as an

³⁴ Ian Haywood, “‘The dark sketches of a revolution’”: Gillray, the *Anti-Jacobin* Review, and the Aesthetics of Conspiracy in the 1790s’, *European Romantic Review*, 22:4 (2011), 431-451, p. 434.

³⁵ *Literary Gazette*, p. 50.

aesthetic and spiritual phenomenon, rather than simply rejecting it as a foreign body in British culture.

A review of *The French Revolution* published in *The Monthly Review* three months after the *Literary Gazette*, repeats the critique of *The French Revolution* as ‘unintelligible’, something that is ascribed to Carlyle’s ‘Germanised’ style: ‘as far as regards language and style, the worst of the worst German school is merely caricatured.’³⁶ Carlyle’s work is not only stylistically-offensive, but also *dangerous*, because it is not ‘expressed in a way that is agreeable, natural, or in the manner of a man who is in possession of a sober mind that yet has been highly cultivated.’³⁷ This is yet another well-rehearsed theme in nineteenth-century propagandistic writing, practised by writers such as William Cobbett and Hannah Moore, whereby writing is said to be the means of ‘civilising’ the minds of the working classes and diverting their thoughts from revolutionary ideas. We can also see the author entering the *Anti-Jacobin* rhetoric when he asserts that the reader stands in danger of being misled by Carlyle’s dangerous ‘German Mysticism and affectation’ into ‘mistaking unintelligible jargon, and adulterated English for profundity, and originality of thought and speech.’³⁸ In the critique of Carlyle’s distinctly foreign and ‘unnatural’ language we hear again the echo of Burke’s aesthetic accusation of the ‘unnatural’ mixing of the genres of tragedy and comedy: ‘Has not the reading of almost every one of these extracts, instead of impressing the mind with any new or precise ideas, induced a doubt whether they are better calculated to excite laughter or sadness?’³⁹ It is only by the end of the article that the reviewer reveals the concern that Carlyle’s ‘monstrous coinages’ may in fact be a dangerous Trojan horse through which a foreign system of thinking is to be potentially imported into Britain:

[W]hat would be the consequence to the English language, and as relates to our English classics, if such quaint, deformed, whimsically affected, and bastard modes of expression should become fashionable amongst our sober-minded countrymen, not to say any thing of the strange and obscure system of *philosophism*, as Mr. Carlyle has it, which would also therewith be imported?⁴⁰

³⁶ *Monthly Review*, in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle’s Major Works*, pp. 51-52, p. 51.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The post-Revolutionary conservative assumptions of this argument are that any non-British mode of thinking is a ‘bastard’ intellectual progeny which must not be tolerated within the ‘British’ tradition. However, the full political potential of this German ‘*philosophism*’ becomes apparent only in the last sentence of the review where, after dismissing *The French Revolution* as no more than a modern *curiosity*, incapable of effecting such a contagious infection with its philosophical deliberations, the author in the last warning to the reader advises them to avoid Carlyle’s work, because it endorses an irrational and dangerous system of *political ethics*. In this last equation the ‘rational style of writing’ becomes synonymous with a rational view of *political ethics*, revealing that the aesthetic tongue channels here both the reviewer’s political and moral concerns. The concept of ‘political ethics’, along with ‘economical ethics’, and other similar constructions register the specifically nineteenth-century concern, most pertinently stated in Mandeville’s ‘The Fable of the Bees’ (1714), that orthodox Christian ethics may have no place within the supposedly egoistically-powered economic and political spheres:⁴¹

We, therefore, while yielding to this History of the French Revolution, the right which it undoubtedly possesses of being regarded as one of the curiosities of modern literature, must set it down as a work that never can be useful, and, which ought to be shunned by every one who desires to cultivate a pure and rational style of writing, as well as to acquire an intelligible system of political ethics.⁴²

It is the last words of the review, then, that reveal to us the political and ethical concern of *The Monthly Review*’s criticism, something that the long linguistic debate on *The*

⁴¹ Compare Herman Merivale’s ‘An introductory lecture on the study of political economy’ (1837) where he argues that political economy as a science should be sharply separated from morality which must become a distinctly separate science: ‘[I]t is evident that those must be in error who appear to treat Political Economy as if it were a branch of Moral Philosophy. I have frequently heard it asserted, by those who are dissatisfied with the present aspect of economical learning, that it is founded on wrong principles in Ethics: that it is based on a low and fallacious estimate of human nature [...]. The proper answer to this objection, I conceive to be, that Political Economy treat of Man no otherwise than as an agent in the process of the production and distribution of wealth: not that the Political Economist denies or undervalues the other qualities and tendencies of his nature; but that he is forced to make abstraction of them as having nothing immediately to do with his own subject-matter. His science proceeds, in part, on assumptions, not on facts [...]. He deals, in the first instance, with certain general tendencies of human nature only: it is for the experimental politician to connect their results with those of the other conflicting tendencies which seem to cross and disturb and counteract each other in the complicated movements of the social machine. And for the purposes of the Science itself, those principles respecting the nature of man—those postulates borrowed from Moral Philosophy—which it is necessary to admit, are very few in number, very simple in character, and all of them such as may either be safely assumed, or are capable of sufficient demonstration.’ Herman Merivale, ‘An introductory lecture on the study of political economy: Delivered June 1, 1837’ (London: Longman, 1837), pp. 13-14.

⁴² *Monthly Review*, p. 52.

French Revolution both implies and obfuscates at the same time, by posing as a *merely* aesthetic tongue (of course, for Carlyle, no such extraction of one human faculty is realistic).

Particularly interesting, given her own support of the French Revolution, is Lady Sydney Morgan's review published in the *Athenaeum* in May 1837, which unflatteringly classifies Carlyle's work as belonging to the 'epoch of transition in which all monstrous and misshapen things are produced in the unguided search of an unknown and unimagined beauty.'⁴³ Morgan's utilitarian argument against Carlyle's aesthetics is that they are of no social usefulness: 'Had the author been bred in another school, we should say that he might have written well and usefully.'⁴⁴ She calls *The French Revolution* 'three long volumes of misplaced persiflage and flippant pseudo-philosophy'⁴⁵ and accuses Carlyle of breaking the literary barriers which separate low and high modes of expression, and specifically of mixing (revolutionary) German speech with the 'king's English'.⁴⁶ Morgan's main argument against such liberal linguistic intermingling between sovereigns and the subjects is that 'every nation must be permitted to "speak for itself"'. The royal English, we are to understand, must remain radically separated from European revolutionary speech in Morgan's account of Carlyle. The critique of Carlyle's *engrafting* of German words and style upon English language also leads us to what Morgan sees as Carlyle's cardinal sin, that is mixing of the categories of the sublime and the ridiculous. She describes Carlyle's argument as 'Pindaric', a reference to Peter Pindar (nom de plume of John Wolcot, 1738-1819) whose anti-royalist and pro-revolutionary satirical works Carlyle knew well and referred to in *Sartor Resartus*.⁴⁷ Similarly to the review in *The Literary Gazette*, then, we see here Morgan applying Burke's argument of an aesthetic confusion to Carlyle's text, which she clearly also believes to be *revolutionary* in itself:

⁴³ Lady Sydney Morgan, an unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, in *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Jules Paul Seigel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 46-51, p. 47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ In fact, *Sartor Resartus* begins by a misquotation from Wolcot's satire on George III, 'The Apple Dumplings and a King': 'How the apples were got in?' Compare Wolcot: 'How, how the devil got the apple in?' Cf. *SR*: 3. Carlyle's satire is both inspired by Wolcot and directed at him at the same time, as he seems to reject both Paine's and Burke's accounts of the French Revolution. In the very question, there is also the smugly hidden Christian answer to the deeper problem of evil in this world, which can be accounted for only in a mythical and indirect way and ultimately remains always an unsolvable mystery.

we must take occasion to protest against all and sundry attempts to engraft the idiom of Germany into the king's English, or to transfuse the vague verbiage and affected sentimentality of a sect of Germans into our simple and intelligible philosophy. As yet, the barriers which separate prose from verse, in our language, are firm and unbroken; as yet, our morals and metaphysics are not quite Pindaric; and our narrative may be understood by a plain man who has learned to read. [...] With respect to language, in particular, every nation must be permitted to 'speak for itself;' and the pedantry of engrafting on any language foreign modes of expression, is unmitigated folly. [...] Such words are misleading and dangerous; and the proper raw material for the construction of *galimatias*. By their use, an author may fancy himself sublime, when he is only ridiculous.'⁴⁸

Morgan is the author of *France* (1817) followed by *France in 1829-30* (1830), which strongly supported the Revolutionary cause and provoked heavy attacks from the conservative British press. She was most bitterly criticised by *The Quarterly Review* for her licentiousness, profligacy, irreverence, blasphemy, libertinism, disloyalty, and atheism'⁴⁹ She was also told

To purchase immediately a spelling book, to which, in process of time, might be added a pocket dictionary, and to take a few lessons in joining-hand; which, superadded to a little common sense, in place of idle ruptures.⁵⁰

A refutation of her work, which condemned Morgan's political liberalism, was written by William Playfair and entitled provocatively: *France as it is, not Lady Morgan's France* (1819).⁵¹ Morgan was also seen in her time as a champion of French Romanticism,⁵² deeply influenced by German and French Romantic movements, and was a follower of Goethe's and of Madame de Staël, yet, despite these Romantic credentials she clearly cannot accept Carlyle's post-Burkean aesthetics and his linguistic inventiveness. Her own Romantic depictions of post-Revolutionary France, modelled on her reading of Madame de Staël, are sometimes strikingly reminiscent of the volcanic imagery used by Carlyle:

⁴⁸ Morgan, p. 48.

⁴⁹ 'Preface' in Lady Morgan, *France*, vol. I (London: Henry Colburn, 1817) p. ix. Cf. also: Dennis R. Dean, 'Sydney Morgan [née Owenson]', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Compare: Jeanne Moskal, 'Gender, Nationality, and Textual Authority in Lady Morgan's Travel Books', in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), pp. 171-193, p. 173.

⁵² *Ibid.*

When the burning floods and frightful explosions of Vesuvius poured ruin and desolation on every object within the sphere of its convulsed action, the elder Pliny was seen exposing himself to its varied forms of danger in the cause of knowledge, and for the benefit of his species: his spirit soaring in sublimity above the wreck of matter, as nature, with all her awful secrets, stood revealed before him. But to the greatest political explosion that time has ever witnessed, or history recorded; to the revolution of France few philosophical Plinys have brought their cool and unbiased scrutiny.⁵³

Yet overall, Morgan's sentimental Romantic book deals with the post-Revolutionary scene, praising the peace and new order which the Revolution has brought. Carlyle's artistic experimentation is clearly too avant-garde for Morgan's taste and appears also to strike too close to home. Whereas it is possible to admire the revolutionary upheaval from a distinctly removed British perspective, Carlyle, in Morgan's view, seems to implement the Revolution too literally onto his 'British' text. What we seem to derive from this critique is the idea that Carlyle's employment of Burke's aesthetics is sponsoring Carlyle's involvement with the revolutionary discourse on a far closer and more intense scale than it is acceptable even for such a Romantic supporter of the Revolution as Morgan.

Another only apparently more sympathetic way of dealing with Carlyle's aesthetics in the contemporary periodical press is to sentimentalise them out of existence, or at least out of being able to carry any valid political, moral or cultural message. This practically means depicting *The French Revolution* as devoid of any meaning, except for the author's sentimental affection for all of the Revolutionary 'wrong-doers'. Clearly, instead of challenging the conservative assumptions of British post-revolutionary moral superiority over the French, this interpretation smugly confirms the ideological *status quo*. In this line, *The Monthly Repository* defends Carlyle's aesthetics on the grounds that Carlyle's account of the Revolution is an expression of his tender and catholic feeling for all humanity, and that Carlyle believes that 'there was good in its worst evil, and a tear due to every sufferer, but not the virtue or settled manhood enough in the light and joyous French character to bring the question to its noblest close.'⁵⁴ This, of course, is yet another way of castrating Carlyle's work politically and morally, while simultaneously inscribing it within the

⁵³ Lady Sydney Morgan, *France in 1816* (London: Printed for H. Colburn, 1817), p. 2.

⁵⁴ 'New Books. Briefly Noticed, but After Thorough Perusal', *Monthly Repository*, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, p. 53.

prevailing politically and morally banal conservative British construction of the Revolution as an instance of unmotivated evil, which allows for no rational political or moral reflection (except such that the French are evil and the British are good, as aptly caricatured in Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities* (1859), itself closely modelled on Carlyle's *French Revolution*).⁵⁵

Carlyle's answer to such an interpretation may be gauged from his opinion on William Makepeace Thackeray's review, which appeared in *The Times* in August 1837. According to Thackeray, the best that can be said of Carlyle's style is that the reader can learn to enjoy his narrative despite its faulty aesthetics, similarly to gradually learning to admire a Gothic cathedral 'in spite of the quaint carvings and hideous images on door and buttress':⁵⁶

Never did a book sin so grievously from outward appearance, or a man's style so mar his subject and dim his genius. It is stiff, short, and rugged, it abounds with Germanisms and Latinisms, strange epithets, and choking double words, astonishing to the admirers of simple Addisonian English.⁵⁷

Despite this, Thackeray lauds Carlyle's Romantic sensibility, which supposedly annuls all moral distinctions, because Carlyle does not differentiate between the revolutionary actors in any morally valid way, and instead endows everyone, murderer or victim, with an equal share of all-embracing love:

He sees with equal eyes Madame Rolan or Marie Antoinette – bullying Brunswick on the frontier, or Marat at his butcher's work or in his cellar – he metes to each of them justice, and no more, finding good even in butcher Marat or bullying Brunswick.⁵⁸

In what follows, Thackeray compares Carlyle to Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877) (whose historical determinism, as we shall see, Carlyle makes it a point to dismiss in *The French Revolution*), by saying that he is 'as impartial as Thiers, but with a far loftier

⁵⁵ Dickens credited *The French Revolution* as his main source and inspiration. Cf. Colin Jones, Josephine McDonagh, and Jon Mee, 'Introduction', in *Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities and the French Revolution*, ed. by Colin Jones, Josephine McDonagh, and Jon Mee (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 2. For a comparative study of *The French Revolution* and *The Tale of Two Cities*, compare for instance: Angus Easson, 'From terror to terror: Dickens, Carlyle and cannibalism', in *Reflections of Revolution*, eds. Alison Yarrington and Kelvin Everest (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 96-111.

⁵⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray, an unsigned review, *The Times*, in Seigel, pp. 69-75, p. 70.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

and noble impartiality.’⁵⁹ He also bluntly simplifies the moral of *The French Revolution*, reading it as the confirmation of the conservative interpretation: ‘The hottest Radical in England may learn by it that there is something more necessary for him even than his mad liberty – the authority, namely, by which he retains his head on his shoulders.’⁶⁰ In a letter to his brother, Carlyle gives his low opinion of the review:

I got one in the Times last week; thinking it might be worth more to you than the postage I sent it forward. The writer is one Thack[e]ray, a half-monstrous Cornish giant; kind of painter, Cambridge man, and Paris Newspaper Correspondent, who is now writing for life, in London: I have seen him at the Bullers’ and at Sterling’s; his article is rather like him, and I suppose calculated to do the Book good.⁶¹

More explicit and poignant, Jane Welsh Carlyle depicts Thackeray as a conservative figure ill-fitted for his new role of a defender of revolutionary politics, and advises him to stick to his satirical illustrations and quit all written political commentary:

Apropos of *the French Revolution*; I have read Thacker[a]y’s article in proof – and as Tommy Burns said of Eliza Stodart’s leg – ‘it’s nae great tings’! so small a *ting* indeed that one barrel of the Inevitable-Gun may be decidedly said to have missed fire – He cannot boast of having, in any good sense, ‘served Thacker[a]y’ however he may have ‘served Carlyle’. When you consider that this is Thacker[a]y’s *coup d’essai* [first attempt], in his new part of political renegade, you will however make some allowance for the strange mixture of bluster and platitude which you will find in his two Columns, and rather pity the poor white man, wishing with Mrs Sterling so often as his name comes up that ‘he would but stick to his sketchings[.]’⁶²

The only review of which Carlyle seems to have expressed a decisively positive opinion in his letters, is John Forster’s one, published in *The Examiner* in September 1837,⁶³ which he forwarded both to his mother and his brother, John, with the high recommendation: ‘the joy one has in the pleasure one’s friends will have to read such things is the only legitimate joy belonging to them.’⁶⁴ What distinguishes Forster’s reading is that it is the only one out of the reviews examined here so far, which pays any

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁶¹ *CL* 9:282-289.

⁶² *CL* 9:269-275.

⁶³ John Forster, ‘The Literary Examiner’, *Examiner*, 17 September 1837, 596-598, and 1 October, 1837, 629-630.

⁶⁴ ‘There is last week a very high-toned thing in the Examiner, which I have joyfully sent off to my Mother; I will also try to get you a Copy: the joy one has in the pleasure one’s friends will have to read such things is the only legitimate joy belonging to them.’ *CL* 9:308-313.

positive attention to Carlyle's sublime presentation of history. Forster describes Carlyle's aesthetics as 'soul-stirring' and lauds Carlyle for imaginatively mediating for the reader the French revolutionary experience. In Forster's reading, the first-person narration and the detailed depiction of the revolutionary scene are designed to engage all of the reader's senses in a truly dramatic and indeed theatrical experience, in which the reader is not only a passive spectator but becomes an actor on a par with the French. Forster describes this admiringly as the 'poetic' value of *The French Revolution*:

We know little that is finer in history than the account of that great event as given in this book. It is soul-stirring to the last degree. We hear it, and see it. The fiery hail whistles round us. We see old Louis Tournay and his comrade smiting with glorious axe, and we hear the huge drawbridge at last come thundering down. Then, in the very midst of the frightful din, and with more frightful things to be done yet, mark with what a fine effect this little touch comes in. It is poetry –⁶⁵

Forster calls *The French Revolution* 'a book of unquestionable originality and genius' and the 'finest book' published on the topic of the French Revolution.⁶⁶ According to Forster, its poetic and even *epic* qualities consist in Carlyle's choice of the most important contemporary event for his theme, and his sympathetic Romantic identification with the heroes of the Revolution, specifically with the French *masses*, whom he sees as the true heroes of Carlyle's book. *The French Revolution* emerges from Forster's description as a mixture of a historical novel, epic poem, and drama, whose direct, lively, and detailed style mediates for the reader the revolutionary realities:

Mr Carlyle has, in these volumes, written a book of unquestionable originality and genius. It is a book conceived in the Epic spirit, and written from the innermost heart of the writer. Everything in it is fresh and real, and it has all the fervor, exaltation, and impressiveness of poetry. Beyond comparison it is the finest book that has yet been published on that world-prodigy, the first French Revolution. It is the distinguishing property of a great mind to identify itself with great objects only, with the larger masses and the more powerful impulses of things, and in this book, though Mr Carlyle writes with as much intensity and minuteness as if he had himself been present in the scenes it commemorates, and had suffered or hoped with the actors in them, it is

⁶⁵ Forster, 'The Literary Examiner' (September 1837), p. 598.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 596.

the philosophy of that terrible Revolution, and not the terror of its details, that impresses itself everywhere on the reader.⁶⁷

However, the most original part of Forster's account of *The French Revolution* is his insistence that Carlyle's sublime (or perhaps even Gothic) representation of the Revolutionary terror does not contradict his rational stance, but, quite on the contrary, it channels it to the reader. Forster insists that Carlyle's chosen genre makes the reading of the book something akin to a cathartic experience, because it forces the readers to face their exuberant historical constructs and to reflect upon them critically. The sublime in this sense reflects Carlyle's rational critique of the British reception of the Revolution. More generally, Carlyle's chosen style, genre, and his view of the Revolution form a continuum, where the Gothic depiction is carefully balanced by Carlyle's intellectual commentary on the events: 'The finest eloquence or the most ruthless logic relieve in their proper seasons the grotesque, the pathetic, the ludicrous, or the horrible.'⁶⁸ This mediation of a 'direct experience' of the Revolution channelled through Carlyle's work allows also for a sympathetic connection with the people of France, as the reader is made to experience their feelings, rather than being exposed to a purely factual narrative. What Forster's text seems unaware of is that this aesthetic mediation of the French feelings is never *pure* in Carlyle's account, due to his open and creative but also highly sceptical attitude to the imaginative faculty's ability to channel history (or indeed to any simple and non-mythologised account). All in all, though, Forster's perception of the aesthetics of *The French Revolution* plays an essential part in his sympathetic reading of Carlyle:

Mr Carlyle thinks it is high time we should cease shrieking about the matter, and begin considering; and this is what he teaches us to do. We do not pursue in his pages a 'phantasma or a hideous dream.' We are placed by him in the minds and situations of the actors and sufferers in the Revolution; we are made to 'relish all things sharply, passioned as they;' we see everywhere the internal character, and not merely the external aspect of things; not the dry facts of history, but the living hopes and fears, the feelings of elevation or of sorrow, which are its inner soul.⁶⁹

Forster's own Romantic reading of Carlyle's sympathetic depiction of the French history is here contrasted with the British fabrications of the Revolution as a 'hideous dream.' Even if we suppose that Carlyle's text is ultimately equally suspicious of its

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 597.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 596.

abilities to mediate the French experience as directly as Forster would have it, yet, we can argue that Forster is insightful in pointing out what we can see as the hallmark of Carlyle's writing. The technique of confronting the reader directly with his/her own demons draws from the Calvinist strand of the Scottish tradition (as instanced in Roberts Burns's 'Holy Willie's Prayer' (1789) and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)), developed and mastered already in *Sartor*, which employs repeatedly the biblical imagery of a bronze serpent (standing for human sin) in the desert, erected by Moses, so that whoever looks at it may be redeemed (Numbers 21:8).⁷⁰

Forster's interpretation (or at least its first part) meets with Carlyle's unconditional approval, which, given the liberal politics of *The Examiner*, does not easily fit in the later ultra-conservative image of Carlyle based on his later writings. Criticism has had a remarkable difficulties making sense of Carlyle's orthodox Calvinist convictions and his early liberal interests, which have been frequently depicted as mutually exclusive.⁷¹ As a matter of fact, the *Examiner* is the only periodical which Carlyle mentions on a regular basis in his letters and not only reads consistently but also recommends and re-sends to his family in the 1830s as the main trustworthy source of political information.⁷² Carlyle seems to consider the position of Leigh Hunt (1784 – 1859), the editor of the *Examiner* and brother of John Hunt, its founder, as ultimately unrealistic regarding the possibilities of 'improving' human nature which he himself from an Orthodox Calvinist view sees as by and large fixed and unchanging. Carlyle's cynical mention of Hunt in his *Reminiscences* (1881) as 'an innocent-hearted, but

⁷⁰ Compare *Sartor Resartus*, the depiction of Teufelsdröckh as 'a man who had manfully defied the "Time-Prince," or Devil, to his face' (SR, 189), and frequent references to Teufelsdröckh facing the 'Serpent-of-Eternity', as well as the prevailing figure of the Basilisk, a mythical figure that kills with its sight, and can only be annihilated by being reflected in a mirror: 'That Basilisk-glance of the Barouche-and-four seems to have withered up what little remnant of a purpose may have still lurked in him: Life has become wholly a dark labyrinth; wherein, through long years, our Friend, flying from spectres, has to stumble about at random, and naturally with more haste than progress.' SR:116.

⁷¹ This is arguably why, for instance, Philip Rosenberg in *The Seventh Hero* in presenting Carlyle as a radical activist has decided to reject Carlyle's Calvinism completely as unimportant to his study; while Chris Vanden Bossche in *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* presents Carlyle's development as that from an aesthete to an adherent of political authoritarianism. Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1991).

⁷² Compare for example: CL 6:163-165, CL 6:150-151, and CL 6:146-148: 'I told Macdiarmid yesterday to send the COURIER hither in future: I mean to send it on to Alick, and the Examiner to you (for I think you liked it best); and I shall be as punctual as possible; only you know how we are situated here; besides I am not yet quite absolutely sure that my London C[orres]pondent will despatch the Examiner, just like [clock]-work: so you must pardon irregularity, should such occur.'

misguided, in fact rather foolish, unpractical and often much-suffering man'⁷³ expresses little of his early fascination and esteem for Hunt's liberal politics, but a lot of his Calvinist suspicion of Hunt's social and moral utopia. This scepticism, mixed with his admiration for Hunt's *Examiner*, is something that we might assume forms part of Carlyle's much more flexible and catholic approach in the 1830s than he is generally given credit for. The mere fact that Forster finds it possible to sympathise with Carlyle's depiction both in aesthetic and political terms would seem to suggest that Carlyle had been affected by the *Examiner*'s liberal spirit.

Carlyle might disagree with Forster's glib passing over the 'the comparative transitoriness of the evil' of the Revolution (since Carlyle's aim is to re-inscribe the Revolution within the moral categories of good and evil, via Gothic genre), but Forster's reading of his sympathy for the Revolutionaries and the idea that they had a legitimate cause and purpose in rebelling seem to be very close to Carlyle's own reading:

The excesses of the days of September, before the commencement of the Reign of Terror, are philosophically treated by Mr Carlyle, because of the simple circumstance that he portrays the chief actors in them as men with some ultimate hope and purpose, and not mere mad or wanton shedders of blood.⁷⁴

Forster finishes his review by drawing attention to the moral of the *French Revolution* which is summarised in the new-found political voice of the French people:

In painting the most terrible scenes of the French Revolution Mr Carlyle is always careful to keep one important consideration in view—which is in fact the moral of the history—that while the shrieks of units and hundreds told over Europe the tale of their frightful suffering, *dumb millions* had felt for the first time in their silence the sense of safety—⁷⁵

We do not know Carlyle's reaction to this second part of Forster's review, published a month later, but we may assume that he would have been pleased with the praise of his sublime depiction of the *sans-culottes*: 'Another eloquent and thoughtful extract will paint the Sansculottes of Paris in a mingled aspect, truly wonderful and pathetic, of atrocity and grandeur—'.⁷⁶ However, Forster's interpretation of the

⁷³ *Reminiscences*, ed. by Ian Campbell and K. J. Fielding (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), p. 80.

⁷⁴ Forster, 'The Literary Examiner' (October 1837), p. 629.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 629.

relativity of moral categories in revolutionary times and his simplistic utilitarian social statement that good causes justify bad men is far from Carlyle's complex, dark and uneasy moral reading of the Revolution (something that we will see more clearly in his answer to Herman Merivale's review). Similarly, the Manichean picture of the moral battle between good and evil, which is translated straightforwardly into the political battle between subjects and their sovereigns in this world goes against Carlyle's far less obvious account of evil's operation in this world:

Fairly roused, however, France became at last; and her leaders found themselves in the appalling position of men who, in order to secure the ground for liberty and independence, must place themselves for a time above the ordinary checks and conditions of humanity. It has been truly remarked by Mr Hazlitt that a good cause may require the aid of bad men and bad passions to contend on equal terms with the extent of means and inveterate malignity arrayed against it by the worst; and, indeed, the reason that it must do so is obvious, since good men, men purely good, have seldom the strength of nerve or stock of virtue to make the sacrifices or incur the responsibility unavoidable in that deadly strife which Evil wages with Good, power with liberty, kings with their subjects.⁷⁷

Closer to Carlyle's anagogical perspective are two reviews published in *Blackwood's* and in the *Christian Examiner*, both of which associate Carlyle's use of the sublime with a spiritual perspective on the impenetrable mysteries of life and death. In *Blackwood's*, John Wilson draws a direct link between Burke's and Carlyle's visions of the Revolution:

Destiny! Fate! Dark words and dreadful – yet may the Christian use them – for the mystery they denote is not cleared up by Revelation – and finite intelligence strives to take refuge from terrors unendurable and not to be overcome, in any creed that seems to afford any shelter [...].⁷⁸

In the latter, an anonymous reviewer in the *Christian Examiner* comments on Carlyle's sublime style: 'With a painter's eye for picturesque groups, and a boy's passion for exciting details, he combines a philosopher's habitual wonder as he stands before the insoluble mysteries of Advent and Death of man.'⁷⁹ Since Burke's sublime is originally

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ John Wilson, *Blackwood's Magazine*, 42 (1837), 592-93, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, pp. 55-56, p. 55.

⁷⁹ *Christian Examiner*, 23 (January 1838), pp. 386-387, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, pp. 56-57, p. 56.

rooted in biblical language and linked to the feelings of terror and reverence which the supernatural inspires in human soul, this seems to be a particularly apt perspective.⁸⁰

Whereas in the *Christian Examiner* the reviewer paints the narratorial perspective of *The French Revolution* as that of a vista enjoyed by a calm and stoical god overseeing the course of history from a distant elevation:

[H]aving seen in the sequence of events the illustration of high and beautiful laws which exist eternal in the reason of man, he beholds calmly like a god the fury of the action, secure in his own perception of the general harmony resulting from the particular horror and pain. This elevation of the historian's point of view is not, however, procured at any expense of attention to details.⁸¹

The always more outspoken and satirical *Fraser's Magazine* compares the author's sublime view to that of Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*: 'We have heard some ascribe a Mephistophilestic [*sic*] spirit to Mr. Carlyle, for the equal indifference with which he seems to treat men of all parties, and creeds, and characters, in this book; as if the good excited no admiration, and the evil no abhorrence.'⁸² However, the reviewer explains:

He has not, however, made the attempt – he has not entirely parted with human feeling; if he laughs, it is not because he has any creature in derision: for this is not among the prerogatives of humanity, and belongs only to Him who sitteth in the heavens. No, he still feels; but he endeavours to feel without prejudice, but not without affection.⁸³

Despite these protestations that Carlyle does not seek to (demonically) usurp the divine moral perspective in his text (a devilish move in *Fraser's* opinion), the narrator's voice

⁸⁰ Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 56: [W]hen we contemplate the Deity, his attributes and their operation, coming united on the mind, form a sort of sensible image, and as such are capable of affecting the imagination. Now, though in a just idea of the Deity, perhaps none of his attributes are predominant, yet, to our imagination, his power is by far the most striking. [...] To be struck with his power, it is only necessary that we should open our eyes. But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him. And though a consideration of his other attributes may relieve, in some measure, our apprehensions; yet no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand. If we rejoice, we rejoice with trembling; and even whilst we are receiving benefits, we cannot but shudder at a power which can confer benefits of such mighty importance.'

⁸¹ *Christian Examiner*, 23 (January 1838), pp. 386-387.

⁸² 'Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution*', in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (1837), 85-104 (pp. 93-4).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

has clearly something demonic in *Fraser's* reading. The reviewer's protestations that it would be *inhuman* and indeed impossible to follow the 'spirit of indifference' in which the book is written seem to confirm this suspicion further (conversely, whereas the reviewer suggests that the narrator's perspective is uncanny and *inhuman*, we can argue that, ironically, in view of Carlyle's artistic provocation, it can be read as very human and indeed on many levels as quite simply *British*). Being the first publisher of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, *Fraser's Magazine* shows here perhaps more familiarity with Carlyle's earlier works, and specifically with *Sartor's* playful depiction of the intractable devilish voice pervading the text to the point of breaking the plot, mimicking and mistranslating words from German to English, and generally depriving both the author and the reader of full control over the meaning of the text, and opening it up to a *demonic* (or perhaps simply imaginative, given Carlyle's complex and often uneasy view of human imagination) plethora of possible interpretations:

Probably the reader will not be able to follow the author in this spirit of indifference; he will feel horror as horror, sin as sin, suffering as suffering, sorrow as sorrow – for is he not human? To do otherwise – attempt to do otherwise – strikes as preterhuman effort; and if so, demonic or angelic? That is the question. A vein of irony pervades the book.⁸⁴

What we also begin to see in both of these spiritual interpretations of Carlyle's text is the reminiscence of the narratorial voice to the image of the divine constructed by Joseph de Maistre in the *Considerations on France* (1796), as well as in Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), whereby God is seen as a cold calculating utilitarian, unconcerned with human misery, who uses humanity mechanically to suit his Providential historical and demographic agendas. According to de Maistre, God *used* the French Revolution in order to inflict punishment upon sinful France (an interpretation readily accepted by the rising wave of the British post-revolutionary conservatism). Malthus subsequently broadens this view to include all natural disasters, laying pseudo-scientific foundations for the moral arguments against helping the growing number of poor in Britain. Malthus is famously presented as a minor and somewhat ridiculous demon, Heuschrecke (German for 'grasshopper'), in *Sartor Resartus*, whose disquisitions on the growth of population suspiciously resemble Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729). Heuschrecke's exuberant (sublime) demonic imagination presents to him apocalyptic pictures in a distinctly biblical tongue,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

which, in Carlyle's opinion, make him more fit for the madhouse than to be a prophetic voice to be followed by his readers:

Enough for us to understand that Heuschrecke is a disciple of Malthus; and so zealous for the doctrine, that his zeal almost literally eats him up. A deadly fear of Population possesses the Hofrath; something like a fixed idea; undoubtedly akin to the more diluted forms of Madness. Nowhere, in that quarter of his intellectual world, is there light; nothing but a grim shadow of Hunger; open mouths opening wider and wider; a world to terminate by the frightfullest consummation: by its too dense inhabitants, famished into delirium, universally eating one another.⁸⁵

Fraser's depiction of the narrator's voice in *The French Revolution* resembles clearly de Maistre's reading and Heuschrecke's confused and apocalyptic writings of a failed and morally-flawed prophet. The reviewer comments further on Carlyle's construction of the persona of the narrator:

Sin, and suffering, and evil, are by such an [*sic*] one considered as agencies of Providence, permitted only for the sake of a result sublimer than could have been brought without them. [...] Carlyle recognises in the worst agent there an instrument in the hand of God, perhaps a scourge – and in the best no more, perhaps a shield – and both aidant in a design of which they are unconscious. The whole cycle of occurrences passes before his mental vision, therefore, as a panorama – a stage-play show – an apocalypse. He is, as it were, in the spirit on the Lord's day, and instructed by a ministering angel to look upon the passing scenes with a prophet's eye; not in relation to time, and time-interests, but in correlation to eternity.⁸⁶

Carlyle's use of irony in his construction of the narrator's persona is something that *Fraser's* description here seems to lose track of, entering into a utilitarian instrumental moral language. Whereas earlier the reviewer admits unease about Carlyle's voice, here it is somewhat simplistically dismissed as an instance of divine providence. The earlier doubts are cleared, and the narrator's 'Mephistophilestic spirit' is reduced to a merely rhetorical tool in Carlyle's writing. The point that the reviewer seems to be both uneasily aware of and unwilling to admit fully is that, in order to see through Carlyle's irony, the readers must be able to admit with Carlyle the demonic element not only in human history but specifically in their own constructions of the past and mythical structures they give credit to. In this sense, Carlyle's oeuvre can be seen as an artistic provocation in the style of the more explicitly playful *Sartor*, which is developed

⁸⁵ *SR*: 167.

⁸⁶ 'Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution*', in *Fraser's*, p. 93.

around the imagery of the mythical basilisk's reflection: British (and other) historical demons can be extinguished only by facing directly the mirror of Carlyle's text. Whereas some of the early reviewers had no problem in locating this playful, Medieval spirit in *Sartor*,⁸⁷ *Fraser's* seems to ultimately lose track of it in the interpretation of *The French Revolution*.

Fraser's description of Carlyle's work as 'aesthetic history' is noteworthy, because it draws attention to some of the critical tensions within the review. *Fraser's* definition appears to preclude any moral reflection on Carlyle's work, following the construction of the moral and the aesthetic as mutually-exclusive categories that we have already seen emerging in Carlyle's contemporary criticism. Yet simultaneously, by placing Carlyle's work in the tradition of Homer and Shakespeare, *Fraser's* both challenges this distinction and suggests that the reason why it is yet impossible to read *The French Revolution* in the same light as Shakespeare's or Homer's works (as works of art, rather than simply as historical accounts) is that the readers lack historical distance from the events described. What the reviewer does not seem to notice, however, is that Carlyle's sublime depiction means to achieve precisely this idea of removal and 'epic distance' which the reviewer believes to be missing in Carlyle's text:

He knows that his history is an aesthetic one; nor is it inexpedient that we should know it too, that we may judge of it correctly according to its kind, antique or novel, or only obsolete. This form of composition was convenient for the writer's peculiar temper; the privileges of the poet and dramatist belong to it. Homer was both Achilles and Hector. Shakespeare paints with the same care his Richards, Macbeths, and Iagos with which he paints his Lears, his Othellos, and Hamlets. It may readily be understood that the world will be fifty or a hundred years before it can contemplate the heroes of the French Revolution with the same impartiality. Mr. Carlyle feels himself called upon neither to applaud nor

⁸⁷ Compare the early readings of *Sartor Resartus*, such as the review in *The Monthly Review* from September 1838, which clearly locates and playfully responds to Carlyle's provocative use of the devil's figure in the text. In a light and satirical review of the work, the anonymous reviewer begins: 'Hereby hangs a tale or a tail, it matters little which way you take it, although the latter term may under certain views be preferred; because the book is about a *tailor re-tailored*, or re-patched; that is to say, clothes are the subject [...]' Cf. D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, 15-17 (p. 15). Cf. also 'The Clothes Philosophy of Carlyle' in *Yale Literary Magazine* 7 (August 1842): 378-382, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, 20-23. Both of these readings inhabit the playful and ironic spirit of *Sartor*, something that seems until today almost impossible in case of *The French Revolution*. Whereas there has been a reasonable amount of playful postmodern, deconstructive and textual focus in the interpretations of *Sartor*, the critical examination of *The French Revolution* seems to have been to a large extent taken from the emphatically non-playful, serious Whig position.

to condemn; is careful only to correlate the facts he finds to the eternal principles out of which they emanate.⁸⁸

The prevalent accusation of the ‘Germanism’ of Carlyle’s style is questioned by *Fraser’s* and identified instead as Carlyle’s intended ‘Latinity’ (with possible echoes of the eighteenth-century Scoto-Latinity of Scottish humanism). According to the reviewer’s insightful examination, it reflects the qualities of pathos and calm reflection upon history which Carlyle’s text allows, and it simultaneously invites the reader to pause and ponder upon the textuality and linguistic complexity of *The French Revolution*, which induce such a deeper meditation upon the mysteries of history (disallowing a simple and straightforward reading). Crucially, then, the textual complexity here emerges as an intended and meaningful stylistic treatment that is in harmony with Carlyle’s artistic agenda:

[T]he reader will forgive the author’s Latinity and inversion of words in some of his sentences, which has been considered, but erroneously and absurdly, to be a German-English style of composition. It is simply the reflex of the writer’s modes of thought, and the result of a studied concision, adopted expressly for concentrating the sense upon an emphatic word, so placed, as to compel the reader to pause in its enunciation, and weigh its whole import and signification.⁸⁹

Finally, despite the apparently apolitical qualities of Carlyle’s book, since *The French Revolution* belongs ‘not to this nation or that, but to all – not to this party or that, but to all – not to one or a few men, but to all – not, in fact, to *men* at all, but to *Man*’;⁹⁰ the reviewer seems to have absorbed something of the politics of Carlyle’s oeuvre. Addressing the periodical’s conservative readership s/he hesitantly challenges *Fraser’s* conservative stance:

Can it be said, that this is not a right point of view from which to contemplate the French Revolution? Verily, it was not *all* evil; and well we know, that the principle of freedom in which it commenced was and is dear to Englishmen. It was, at first, hailed by the best, the wisest, and the most poetic spirits in our land.⁹¹

Where does Carlyle draw his aesthetic theory from? We have already begun to answer this question by looking at Burke’s aesthetics, and tracing the prevailing accusations of ‘Germanism’ in the contemporary reception of *The French Revolution*, and have

⁸⁸ ‘Thomas Carlyle’s *French Revolution*’, in *Fraser’s Magazine*, p. 104.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

suggested that the German readings mediate for Carlyle the Burkean sublime. One specific source of Carlyle's aesthetics is suggested by the American *Boston Quarterly Review*, which is usually more favourable to Carlyle. In a rather flamboyant review by W. H. Channing from January 1838 (which perhaps suggests more fascination with Carlyle's style than Channing is willing to admit), Carlyle's novel aesthetics in *The French Revolution* are criticised as morally *indecent*.⁹² Channing points to Carlyle's *Life of Schiller* (1825) as the place of the 'fatal' change in Carlyle's aesthetic-moral stance, which leads to the decay of his style from an originally *decent* (depicted, in what can be read as a Freudian slip, as a 'naked strength and free play movement') to the 'lawless friskiness' pervading his later writings. In a most fantastic imagery of an outgrown and putrid vegetation, the reviewer depicts the gradual deterioration both of Carlyle's style and of his state of mind, which in *The French Revolution* leaves his intellect attacked and infected by a pestilence of tropical germs:

Of his later writings it would not be far from the truth to say that we like them, not by reason of the style, but in *spite* of it. They are so savagely uncouth by the side of his former classic gracefulness. It is a savage crowned with ivy though, and crushing luscious grapes as he dances. But the *Life of Schiller* and the early essays had all this naked strength and free play movement, and yet were decent. They wore their garland of imagery like a festive wreath; and though bright and cheerful, with the melody of pipes, they had no lawless friskiness. He has always been remarkable for the picturesqueness of the metaphors which clothes his thoughts. But this growth of the symbolic has become ranker and ranker, until in this last book, the very trees in full foliage are fringed with mosses. It seems as if the axis of his mind had shifted, and the regions of fancy had been brought from the temperate zone beneath the tropics, and hidden germs were bursting prodigally into life.⁹³

If this fantastic mention of *The Life of Schiller* can be taken seriously at all, it can draw our attention to a text which witnesses the development of Carlyle's own aesthetical programme through an artistic discussion with Schiller's aesthetics taken from an increasingly Burkean position. In the following chapter we will examine more closely this debate taking place in Carlyle's text.

⁹² W. H. Channing, *Boston Quarterly Review*, 1 (October 1838): 407-17, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, pp. 57-62.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Chapter 3: 'Beautiful Souls': Carlyle and Schiller's Aesthetics

In *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, edited by Mark Cumming, in the entry on 'Goethe' David R. Sorensen argues that the main lesson that Carlyle takes from Goethe is his rejection of utilitarianism on the one hand, and Christianity, which is described as 'otherworldly' on the other:

Goethe recognised that neither otherworldly Christianity nor utilitarianism could serve as satisfactory guides in the modern world. Orthodox Christianity's vision of eternal life and damnation distracted its followers from the glories of everyday existence. Utilitarianism conceived human nature in far lower terms and advanced a mechanical theory of behaviour based on calculations of pleasure and pain.¹

Whereas in the preceding entry, entitled 'God', it is argued that Carlyle rejected Christianity 'from an early age',² here Sorensen argues that in *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle converts from Goethe's aesthetic creed to 'political activism'. Goethe is an artist, whose 'dramatic Fiction' (Goethe's *Der Gross-Coptha* (1791)) Carlyle can praise, but cannot accept in his own writings, which are more interested in 'social and political' thought.³ Since the 'social and political' strand of Carlyle's thought has been essentially the main focus of Carlylean criticism, the aesthetical debate in *The Life of Schiller* (1823-25) has received little critical coverage. Chris R. Vanden Bossche reads Carlyle's study of Goethe's and Schiller's aesthetic doctrines as a replacement for his early Christian views: 'Carlyle's Schiller and Goethe recuperate the domestic idyll by turning to the institution of literature.'⁴ In this narrative, though, which is reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Carlyle does not find the 'lost idyll' in Schiller's aesthetics and ultimately rejects it: 'Although *The Life of Schiller* concludes by affirming the 'creed' of literature, it does not successfully envision literature as capable of reproducing the lost idyll.'⁵

Bossche has considered *The Life of Schiller* as a text in which Carlyle examines the Enlightenment ideal of history, and comes close to the Whig historical school, in

¹ David R. Sorensen, 'Goethe', in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 201.

² This is based on the fact that reportedly, '[at] an age of fifteen he asked his devout mother pointedly: 'Did God Almighty come down and make wheelbarrows in a shop.' *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 189.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴ Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p. 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

which the ideas of social utility and civilisational progress are paramount. Bossche quotes Carlyle's description of Schiller's history as 'philosophy teaching by experience' in order to juxtapose it with Carlyle's later position, which is supposedly comparable to Macaulay's historical school, whose texts, we are told, despite his explicit disagreement with Macaulay, Carlyle secretly admired⁶ (whereas I will argue in the following chapters that Carlyle's historical agenda is directed specifically *against* Macaulay's programme and the Whig historical model). According to Bossche, Carlyle's historiography approaches the view held by Macaulay that: 'History, it has been said, is philosophy teaching by examples. Unhappily what the philosophy gains in soundness and depth, the examples generally lose in vividness.'⁷ In Schiller's writings, according to Bossche, Carlyle finds the ideal of progressive development of human history towards freedom:

Through Schiller, Carlyle was able to absorb much of what was being written about history by German philosophers and historians, including the key views that history requires a philosophical, as opposed to merely antiquarian, perspective and that it is progressive and moves toward human freedom.⁸

Bossche's account follows the already glimpsed pattern of reading Carlyle's thought as divided between the religious fanaticism of his father on the one hand, and German Romanticism on the other. The latter apparently channels for Carlyle the idea of historical progressivism:

Carlyle was attracted to Schiller because he preferred a view of history that retained some notion of divine guidance, even one that would, as in his theory of heroes, see that guidance manifested in human form; but his faith in humanity was too limited to give full scope to Schiller's view of human progress.⁹

Carlyle's 'drive towards transcendence' is seen as a recurring and destructive trend in his historiography which 'return[s] Carlyle to the prison of solipsism.'¹⁰ In Bossche's reading, then, the development of Carlyle's thought leads him from Christian

⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Historical Essays*, ed. by Chris Vanden Bossche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 453. Bossche presents Carlyle as 'a grudging admirer of Macaulay's writing'. Compare also David R. Sorensen's contention that 'Ironically, the two authors' dislike of each other, prevented them from acknowledging their mutual interests and concerns.' Sorensen, *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 300.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', p. xxxvi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

historicism (embraced by his authoritarian father and rooted in the Calvinist idea of predestination) to political authoritarianism which shifts Carlyle's authoritarian image of God to that of political dictatorship. In accordance with this critical pattern, the main insight that Carlyle takes from his German dialogue with Schiller, Goethe, and German Romantic literature is the image of art as a replacement for religion (in the tradition of Herder):

It was not until Carlyle encountered the German Romantics that he began to represent literature as a replacement for religion. [...] Because literature recuperates theocracy, the author is not only prophet but king, producing the texts of the law as well as of belief. Just as literary authors create new beliefs and new Bibles, they also create new laws as 'legislators' and lawmakers.¹¹

While this reading seems apt indeed in the consideration of Carlyle's later political writings, Bossche reads Carlyle's whole life as a narrative of 'progress' in which the 'search for authority' is the leading theme of all Carlyle's texts. In this perspective, *The French Revolution*, which Bossche rightly sees as questioning all such grand narratives, is seen as an imperfect and transitory text in Carlyle's thought, in which his new social and political ideal has not yet been developed.¹²

Marylu Hill's reading presents a more nuanced perception of Carlyle's dialogue with Enlightenment and Romantic historiographies. She argues convincingly that Carlyle manages to

engage his verbal [Enlightenment] predecessors on their own battlefield, rather than simply attacking them as part of a Romantic counter-reaction [...] Thus, his main weapons are those of the Enlightenment: turning a sceptical eye on the process itself of telling history – specifically the Enlightenment *faith* in the scientific ordering of evidence and the rational explanation of that evidence.¹³

What we see in Hill's reading is a stronger stress on the continuity between the Enlightenment and Romantic strands in Carlyle's thought. Hill rightly draws attention to the intricate dialogue with Enlightenment model of rationality that is developed in

¹¹ Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, pp. 29-30. On the other hand, we are told, German texts also confirm Carlyle's teleological readings of history: 'that history is the manifestation of divine providence and that history is an alteration of cycles of belief and unbelief.' *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 62-89.

¹³ Marylu Hill, 'Reason and Revelation in Carlyle's Historical Essays', in *Literature and Belief*, ed. by Paul E. Kerry and Jesse S. Crisler, vol. 25:1, 2 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2005), 123-138 (p. 125).

Carlyle's conception of history, and she points to Carlyle's debt to the Scottish Enlightenment (specifically to Hume) in his historical sensibility. Following Rosenberg, Hill also sees Carlyle's writings as developing towards a kind of Hegelianism with the exception that Carlyle's Christian views channel his perception of human life as ultimately founded on *mystery*, rather than on *progress*:

Hegel's sense of the dialectic presupposes a definite telos or progress towards a defined goal. Carlyle, however, while conceding the movement forward, is more insistent on the mystery and less on the actual progress.¹⁴

Building upon these insights, I will argue that, in spite of his protestations against the Scottish philosophy of common sense, Carlyle's own Romantic vision is a development of the Scottish Enlightenment perspective on human rationality, rather than its outright rejection. I will, however, also contend that a much larger allowance should be made for Carlyle's Calvinism if his historical stance is to be appreciated fully. In an orthodox Calvinist perspective, any claims of historical progress can be seen not only as mistaken but also as outright *heretical* (if anything, Carlyle sees mankind as by and large *deteriorating* morally rather than *progressing*). In this light, Hill's focus on the complex dialogue with the Enlightenment historical sensibility developed in Carlyle's writings deserves further study. This debate has been often underappreciated, in tune with Froude's portrayal of Carlyle as an anti-Enlightenment figure and Harrold's biased image of Enlightenment as hostile to all metaphysical and religious interpretation of life.¹⁵ We can trace Carlyle's dialogue with the Enlightenment sensibility back to the 1820s when it is linked directly to his reading of eighteenth-century German aesthetics and the French encyclopaedists up until the publication of *The Diamond Necklace* (1837), which properly constitutes a prelude to *The French Revolution* (and deserves a greater critical attention than it has been granted thus far.).

The Life of Schiller can be seen as Carlyle's first major study of the aesthetics of the sublime. This aesthetic discussion is embedded within the context of Schiller's biography and, specifically, within Carlyle's examination of the German and French

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁵ Cf. Charles Frederick Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 154. Enlightenment, according to Harrold, was characterised by 'hostility to all metaphysical, idealistic, [and] religious interpretation of the human record.' For a more balanced view, compare also Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), where he sees Carlyle as influenced by the school of Thomas Reid and William Hamilton.

history in the late eighteenth century, and, as such, it envisages aesthetics as directly linked to the political, historical and moral spheres. This broad perspective is the hallmark of Carlyle's Enlightenment vision of life, which is both ethical, philosophical, political, spiritual and aesthetic. As such, it contradicts specifically the nineteenth-century Whig tendency to separate these spheres as distinct and incommensurable. As we already suggested in the previous chapter, the dialogue with Schiller's aesthetics can also be seen as channelling for Carlyle the Burkean concept of the sublime.

Friedrich Schiller's (1759-1805) aesthetics, similarly to Burke's, are profoundly challenged by the French Revolution. Schiller's use of the sublime in connection with the revolutionary and liberal themes in his dramas, such as *The Robbers* (1781), *Fiesco's Conspiracy at Genoa* (1783), *Don Carlos* (1787), as well as his history, *The Revolt of The Netherlands* (1788), earned him the image, both in France and internationally, of an early propagator of French revolutionary ideas, as well as an honorary citizenship of the French Republic.¹⁶ As Carlyle notices, Schiller also considered intervening in French politics by writing on the Revolution, a plan which he never realised. Until 1792 he still continues to write eulogies about the newly realised French *élan moral*.¹⁷ However, Schiller's horror at the guillotining of Louis XVI made him consider all his earlier enthusiasm as a mistake that he blames on his youthful inexperience, and ultimately to withdraw all his earlier support for the French Revolution.¹⁸

In *The Life of Schiller* Carlyle quotes Schiller's famous essay, *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), where Schiller develops his concept of 'beautiful souls' as an aesthetic antidote to what he sees as the peril the French Revolution posed to the Enlightenment vision of human rationality and to his own philosophical liberalism. Schiller's choice of words is crucial: the new state of humanity as *beautiful souls* emphasises both his physical disgust at the carnal violence of the revolutionary terror and his Romantic vision of a sublimated, aesthetically-pleasing revolt. Schiller's disappointment with the French Revolution can be glimpsed in his depiction of the revolutionary change which, instead of accomplishing his high philosophical ideal, reveals the 'crude, lawless instincts' of the unruly and aesthetically-repulsive masses:

¹⁶ Cf. Maurice Boucher, *La Révolution de 1789 vue par les écrivains allemands ses contemporains* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1954), p. 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

The fabric of the natural State is tottering, its rotten foundations are giving way, and there seems to be a *physical* possibility of setting law upon the throne, of honouring man at last as an end in himself, and making true freedom the basis of political associations. Vain hope! The *moral* possibility is lacking, and the moment so prodigal of opportunity finds a generation unprepared to receive it. [...] Among the lower and more numerous classes we are confronted with crude, lawless instincts, unleashed with the loosening of the bonds of civil order, and hastening with ungovernable fury to their animal satisfaction.¹⁹

In Schiller's own aesthetic ideal, the true and first revolutionary is an artist who is distanced from the physicality of 'vulgar humanity', and who dispenses his artistic vision to the people, thus allowing for the birth of aesthetics (and morality):

[B]ut how under the influence of a barbarous constitution is character ever to be ennobled? [...] For whole centuries thinkers and artists will do their best to submerge truth and beauty in the depths of a degenerated humanity; it is they themselves who are drowned there, while truth and beauty, with their own indestructible vitality, struggle triumphantly to the surface.²⁰

The hierarchical direction of this movement from the artistic 'heights' towards 'the depths of degenerated [or vulgar]²¹ humanity' below forms the axis of Schiller's Romantic vision of the distinguished and removed position of the artist in society (both highly appealing to Carlyle, as we shall see). Through his creative vision, the artist supposedly allows for the appearance of the aesthetic, without which morality is impossible. In contrast to the unqualified praises of liberty in his early dramas, in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* Schiller cautiously places beauty before liberty, arguing that the road to political liberty must necessarily lead first through the aesthetic education of humanity, which can be realised only via the creative action of the artist:

That I [...] put Beauty before Freedom, can, I believe, not only be excused on the score of personal inclination, but also justified on principle. I hope to convince you that the theme I have chosen is far less alien to the needs of our age than to its taste. More than this: if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom.²²

¹⁹ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and tr. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²¹ Compare the translation by Reginald Snell, in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 51: 'the depths of vulgar humanity'.

²² *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and tr. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, p. 9.

While the French Revolution is never explicitly mentioned, it has been strongly argued that Schiller's aesthetical doctrine is a roundabout answer to the problem which the French Revolution poses to his earlier *Sturm und Drang* sensibility, and which, in the wake of the Revolution, appears both politically and morally suspect.²³ Because neither reason nor morality (in the Enlightenment vision of human morality as rational), according to Schiller, can be relied upon during periods of sudden revolutionary changes, the aesthetic must assume their role, as a 'support' to morality. This move is then generalised to apply to all rational thought process as such: reason, in order to return to itself, must always first pass via aesthetic experience. What we see developed in Schiller's aesthetic theory, then, is a broad vision of human rationality as drawing both from the spheres of ethics and aesthetics in a manner that channels his radical critique of Western rationality in the wake of the Revolution:

What we must chiefly bear in mind, then, is that physical society *in time* must never for a moment cease to exist while moral society *as idea* is in the process of being formed [...]. For this reason a support must be looked for which will ensure the continuance of society, and make it independent of the Natural State which is to be abolished. This support is not to be found in the natural character of man, which, selfish and violent as it is, aims at the destruction of society rather than at its preservation. Neither is it to be found in his moral character which has, *ex hypothesi*, first to be fashioned, and upon which, just because it is free, and because it never becomes manifest, the lawgiver could never exert influence, nor with any certainty depend.²⁴

We witness here a shift from Schiller's earlier, more positive vision of human morality to Hobbes's portrayal of egoistic, 'selfish and violent' human nature that receives its *moral character* from what Schiller idealistically sees as the joint powers of the political and the artistic. The aesthetic emerges as a sphere which can be relied upon specifically during large revolutionary movements, such as the French Revolution. However, in Schiller's larger perspective on human life as being revolutionary in its very essence, the aesthetic is also a constant supplement to morality, which cannot be reached except through an aesthetical detour. The aesthetic frequently assumes such a distinguished role in Schiller's thinking that moral categories appear to be altogether superfluous, since all that is necessary is that the *vulgar* perception of reality should become transformed into an aestheticised insight:

²³ Compare Terry Eagleton's reading of Schiller's aesthetics in 'Schiller and Hegemony', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990), 102-119.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

There can, in a single word, no longer be any question of how [man] is to pass from Beauty to Truth, since this latter which is potentially contained in the former, but only a question of how he is to clear a way for himself from common reality to aesthetic reality, from mere life-serving feelings to feelings of beauty.²⁵

Supposedly a necessary detour on the way to ethics, as Terry Eagleton notices, aesthetics in Schiller's account becomes the very *seat* of freedom, rather than a transitory stage to the ethical.²⁶ Eagleton describes Schiller's vision of aesthetics as 'Olympian indifferentism',²⁷ and a kind of 'creative impasse, a nirvanic suspension of all determinacy.' The obvious problem with such a vision, he notices, is that it seemingly dispenses with moral categories altogether: 'As the very taproot of our moral virtue, the aesthetic is apparently invalid unless it predisposes us indifferently to martyrdom or murder.'²⁸ (This idea of the artist's aesthetic 'indifferentism', as we shall see, is examined artistically in Carlyle's *Sartor* and *French Revolution*).

Given Schiller's own disappointment and disgust towards the revolutionary realities in France, we could argue that his concept of the aesthetic can also be seen as escapist, presenting an appealing utopian construct, whereby ethics, aesthetics and political reality coexist in perfect harmony (held in balance by the creative action of the artist). Schiller's way of defending his pre-revolutionary liberalism is to argue that the French nation was 'morally' unprepared for the enlightened ideas which the Revolution attempted to embody. His disillusionment with the French Revolution is apparent when he concludes in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*: 'the moment so prodigal of opportunity finds a generation unprepared to receive it.'²⁹ (The same idea is conveyed more insistently in Schiller's epigram, 'The Moment': 'A momentous epoch hath the century engendered,/ Yet the moment so great findeth a people so small.'³⁰) Only a nation that has learned and assumed as *second nature* the lessons of aesthetic sublimation of experience, in Schiller's thought, is ready to accomplish a true (aesthetically-pleasing, and therefore rational) revolution. In Schiller's utopian vision,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990), p. 109.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁹ *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and tr. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, p. 25.

³⁰ Friedrich Schiller, 'The Moment', in *Friedrich Schiller: Poet of Freedom*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1985) p. 325.

once the ‘science’ of aesthetics has been assimilated by every citizen, moral conduct will become a necessity:

If, therefore, we are to be able to count on man’s moral behaviour with as much certainty as we do on natural effects, it will itself have to be nature, and he will have to be led by his very impulses to the kind of conduct which is bound to proceed from a moral character.³¹

In Schiller’s statement: ‘all [...] without exception, must fall away from Nature by the abuse of Reason before they can return to her by the use of Reason.’³² Schiller’s ultimate aim, then, is a return to (pre-Revolutionary) rationality even at the price of apparently rejecting his early political and philosophical liberalism.

Schiller’s concept of art as an antidote to irrationality is spelled out in the grammar of ‘barbarism’ of the pro-oligarchic French Enlightenment elite, and the ‘savagery’ of the uneducated population:

But man can be at odds with himself in two ways: either as a savage, when feeling predominates over principle; or as barbarian, when principle destroys feeling. The savage despises Civilization, and acknowledges Nature as his sovereign mistress. The barbarian derides and dishonours Nature, but, more contemptible than the savage, as often as not continues to be the slave of his [senses]. The man of Culture makes a friend of Nature, and honours her freedom whilst curbing only her caprice.³³

Neither the ‘savage’ nor the ‘barbarian’ are capable of achieving Schiller’s ideal of an aesthetical detour, the former being too close to the unruly and morally-unrestrained nature, the latter – too far from it. This perception is again clearly embedded in Schiller’s physical repulsion towards both the French *savage* mob and the *depraved* aristocracy, both of whom Schiller finds aesthetically revolting:

Among the lower and more numerous classes we are confronted with crude, lawless instincts, unleashed with the loosening of the bonds of civil order, and hastening with ungovernable fury to their animal satisfactions. [...] The cultivated classes, on the other hand, offer the even more repugnant spectacle of lethargy, and of a deprivation of character which offends the more because culture itself is its source.³⁴

Although Schiller’s theory requires reason to take a detour via aesthetics, it must be achieved without stopping in this immensely appealing but dangerous sphere for too

³¹ *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and tr. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, p. 17.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

long. This revolutionary move is compared directly to sexual intercourse, which is figured as a dangerous sphere that needs to be simultaneously aesthetically *ennobled* by the sense of beauty and *suppressed* by morality:

But with this State of compulsion, born of what Nature destined him to be, and designed to this end alone, he neither could nor can rest content as a Moral Being. [...] With that same right, therefore, by virtue of which he is Man, he withdraws from the dominion of blind necessity, even as in so many other respects he parts company from it by means of his freedom; even as, to take but one example, he obliterates by mean of morality, and ennobles by means of beauty, the crude character imposed by physical need upon sexual love.³⁵

The purpose of art, according to Schiller, is then as contradictory as Schiller's vision of the French Revolution: to draw from reality and simultaneously to radically 'ennoble' or even suppress reality (with which art cannot stay satisfied). Similarly, Schiller's lectures on aesthetical education can be read as both obfuscating and justifying (by sublimating it) Schiller's own early 'erroneous' fascination with the Revolution.

Aesthetics also emerges from Schiller's account as an educational tool that can serve as an indirect prop to politics and religion by creating desirable attitudes in the population:

Their maxims wilt thou storm in vain, their deeds condemn in vain, but thou canst try thy forming hand upon their idleness. Chase away the caprice, the frivolity, the roughness from their pleasures, so wilt thou banish them imperceptibly too from their actions, finally from their character. Where thou findest them, surround them with noble, with great, with ingenious forms, enclose them all around with symbols of excellence, until appearance overcomes reality, and art, nature.³⁶

Paradoxically, in Schiller's vision, only such an 'educated', sublimated mob is worthy of a poet's attention, which is corroborated in reality in Schiller's complete lack of a direct political commentary on the Revolution ever since the execution of Louis XVI.

In *The Life of Schiller*, Carlyle shows himself as an expert handler of the sublime mode, while at the same time he implicitly questions Schiller's lack of a sublime commentary on the French Revolution. Carlyle is aware of the central position of aesthetics in Schiller's thought as well as the large, not only artistic, but also

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶ Quoted in: William F. Wertz, Jr., 'A Reader's Guide to *Letters on the Aesthetical*', *Fidelio* 14:1-2 (2005), 81-106 (p. 92).

philosophical – and even religious – claims in Schiller’s theory. In this context, the manner in which Carlyle introduces the aesthetic into his biography of Schiller is highly significant for our reading. Whereas Carlyle’s own German interest (as we have seen in Chapter One) has often been juxtaposed with his religion, what we see in his examination of Schiller’s sublime is that both form part of the same experience for Carlyle. Schiller’s early interest in Kant’s philosophy, according to Carlyle, grows directly from his religious curiosity and his search for rational grounds of his belief in God, grace, and the soul’s immortality:

A system which promised, even with very little plausibility, to accomplish all that Kant asserted his complete performance of; to explain the difference between Matter and Spirit, to unravel the perplexities of Necessity and Free-will; to show us the true grounds of our belief in God, and what hope nature gives us of the soul’s immortality; and thus at length, after a thousand failures, to interpret the enigma of our being, – hardly needed that additional inducement to make such a man as Schiller grasp at it with eager curiosity.³⁷

These metaphysical and spiritual interests lead Carlyle to comment on Schiller’s fascination with Kant’s aesthetics:

The only department to which he attached himself with his ordinary zeal was that which relates to the principles of the imitative arts, with their moral influences, and which in the Kantian nomenclature has been designated by the term *Aesthetics* or the doctrine of sentiments and emotions.³⁸

Introducing into Schiller’s scope of interest the figure of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), a thinker whose strong concept of culture presents it not only as the mediator of morality, but also as its very seat, Carlyle draws attention to the gradual aestheticisation of religion which he reads in Schiller’s writings.³⁹ This is both a fascinating trait of Schiller’s aesthetic philosophy for Carlyle and also its very danger. Whereas Carlyle sees Schiller’s concept of the sublime as rooted in Christian thought, he is also aware that it becomes associated in Schiller’s agenda with the ideology of moral progress which is alien to Christian thought:

³⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H. D. Traill, 30 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-1899), 25:110. (Hereafter this edition will be cited as *Works*, followed by volume and page numbers in Arabic numerals.)

³⁸ *Works* 25:111.

³⁹ Cf. Compare also on Herder and the mythological school: E. S. Shaffer, *Kubla Khan and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature: 1770-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

These *Letters on Aesthetic Culture*, without the aid of anything which the most sceptical could designate as superstition, trace out and attempt to sanction for us a system of morality, in which the sublimest feelings of the Stoic and the Christian are represented but as stages in our progress to the pinnacle of true human grandeur.⁴⁰

What we also see here is Carlyle rehearsing the Scottish Enlightenment debate on the moral sense and trying to make room for it in the ideology of progress – something that will be developed artistically in the philosophical discussion in *Sartor*. The main question that Carlyle is attempting to make sense of is the Enlightenment dilemma: is morality historically relative and culture-specific; or is there a conscience (moral sense), which unites all humanity at all times and places? *The French Revolution* in this sense can be seen as a moral case study that Carlyle presents to the reader (if the Revolution is morally illegible, and if the reader can see recent French history in the light of ‘aesthetic indifferentism’, then the case for moral relativism would seem to be valid). Above all, though, Carlyle sees Schiller’s interest in aesthetics as a challenge to nineteenth-century British utilitarianism: ‘The scheme of morality, which they [*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*] inculcate, soars into a brighter region, very far beyond the ken of our ‘Utilities’ and ‘Reflex-senses.’⁴¹ The moral debate that the sublime theory allows is at the centre of Carlyle’s reading. When discussing Schiller’s ‘The Stage Considered as A Moral Institution’ (1784), Carlyle describes German theatre as a place of moral dispute, as contrasted with what can perhaps be seen as Joseph Addison’s (1672–1719) theory, presented in the *Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination* (1712), where the aesthetic is the place of the writer’s (morally) ‘innocent pleasures’ in the sphere of imagination (as opposed to the dangerous and potentially sinful sensual pleasures):

With us, the question about the moral tendency of theatrical amusements is now very generally consigned to the meditation of debating clubs, and speculative societies of young men under age; with our neighbours it is a weighty subject of inquiry for minds of almost the highest order. With us, the stage is considered as a harmless pastime, wholesome because it occupies the man by occupying his mental, not his sensual faculties [...].⁴²

Compare Addison:

⁴⁰ *Works* 25:114.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

The pleasures of the imagination, taken in their full extent, are not so gross as those of sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding. The last are, indeed, more preferable, because they are founded on some new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man; yet it must be confessed that those of the imagination are as great and as transporting as the other.⁴³

The discussion of the spiritual roots of Schiller's aesthetic programme, as well as its moral appeal in 'The Stage Considered as A Moral Institution', allows Carlyle to present his own literary agenda, which he calls repeatedly his 'lay pulpit' (Carlyle studied at Edinburgh University between 1809-1815 to become a minister in the Church of Scotland before choosing a career as a periodical writer). The sublime, which in Addison's (and Burke's) construct, is primarily the language of the spiritual contemplation of divine mysteries ('The sublimity of God consists in this that like Locke says, all we imagine of him, we must multiply it'⁴⁴), is for Carlyle a perfect tool of meditation on the spiritual, expressed in a tongue secularised enough to be able to mediate between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'. The theatre, in Schiller's conception, is not only a 'lay pulpit' and a 'worthy ally of the sacred one', but it is also far more suitable for aesthetically engaging the audience than theological language.⁴⁵ Carlyle finds the aesthetic puritanism of the Presbyterian church, devoid of its Medieval aesthetics, to be a major flaw in its spiritual mission. Religion, he claims, must engage all of the senses of the faithful, as well as their imagination, speaking 'through many avenues':

The Germans, on the contrary, talk of it as of some new organ for refining the hearts and minds of men; a sort of lay pulpit, the worthy ally of the sacred one, and perhaps even better fitted to exalt some of our nobler feelings; because its objects are much more varied, and because it speaks to us through many avenues, addressing the eye by its pomp and

⁴³ Joseph Addison, *Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination* (Antwerp: Duvenger, 1828), p. 92.

⁴⁴ *A Selection from the Papers of Addison in the Spectator and Guardian* (London: C.&J. Rivington, 1827), p. 113.

Compare also: 'Those who will not feel him in his love, will be sure at length to feel him in his displeasure. And how dreadful is the condition of that creature, who is only sensible of the being of his Creator by what he suffers from him! He is as essentially present in hell as in heaven. But the inhabitants of the former behold him only in his wrath, and shrink within the flames to conceal themselves from him. It is not in the power of imagination to conceive the fearful effects of Omnipresence incensed.' *The Spectator, Complete in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (New York: Samuel Marks, 1826), p. 341.

⁴⁵ Compare Carlyle's letter to John Sterling in which he encourages him to preach to England from the secular pulpit of the periodical press: 'Two things as you say seem very plain: first that there is at present no preaching in England, and a visibly growing appetite (the sternest necessity there has long been) to have some: and second, that the Printing Press is the only or by far the chief Pulpit in these days.' *CL*, 15:159-161.

decorations, the ear by its harmonies, and the heart and imagination by its poetical embellishments, and heroic acts and sentiments.⁴⁶

As we already noticed, Carlyle is also well aware of the idea that the aesthetic ‘sublime tongue’ of the theatre is fast turning into not only an innocent supplement to religion but its actual substitute:

Influences still more mysterious are hinted at, if not directly announced. An idea seems to lurk obscurely at the bottom of certain of their abstruse and elaborate speculations, as if the stage were destined to replace some of those sublime illusions which the progress of reason is fast driving from the earth; as if its pageantry, and allegories, and figurative shadowing-forth of things, might supply men’s nature with much of that quickening nourishment which we once derived from the superstitions and mythologies of darker ages.⁴⁷

Schiller establishes theatre as a place where religious ideas find their full expression in ‘The Stage Considered as A Moral Institution’. Spiritual truths, in Schiller’s thought, require the assistance of the theatre, which can mediate religious symbols and mysteries more profoundly and effectively. Schiller also sees the theatre as a supplement to the religious ritual, the latter being supposedly the demesne of the ‘sensuous side of the population’, rather than of the artist (who appears here to be sublimely removed from the religious tongue):

[Re]ligion [...] acts mainly on the sensual part of the people. It probably has an infallible effect only by way of the senses. It loses its power if we take this away. [...] Religion ceases to be anything for most men if we remove its images, its problems, if we destroy its pictures of heaven and hell. [...] What strength religion and law can gain when they are allied with the stage, where reality can be viewed as living presence, where vice and virtue, happiness and misery, folly and wisdom pass in review before man in thousands of true and concrete pictures [...].⁴⁸

The sublime, then, emerges here both as the proper language for mediating spiritual truths and as its potentially dangerous ally, capable of usurping the symbolic grammar. However, according to Carlyle, what gives Schiller a claim to be one of the leading voices in German literature is not so much his aesthetic theory, but his dramatic works

⁴⁶ *Works*, 25:46. William Makepeace Thackeray’s comparison of Carlyle’s *French Revolution* to a Gothic cathedral embellished with ‘quaint carvings and hideous images on door and buttress’ might give us the idea that through Schiller’s aesthetics Carlyle is seeking to regain this Medieval aesthetical potential in his texts. William Makepeace Thackeray, an unsigned review, *The Times*, in Seigel, pp. 69-75, p. 70.

⁴⁷ *Works*, 25:47.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Schiller, ‘The Stage Considered as a Moral Institution’, in *Essays on German Theatre*, ed. by Margaret Herzfeld-Sander (New York: Continuum, 2002), 24-33 (p. 25).

which mediate the spiritual through their use of sublime imagery. A ‘passion for the true and the sublime under all their various forms’ is what distinguishes Schiller’s theatrical productions:

Of wit and its kindred graces Schiller has but a slender share: nor among great poets is he much distinguished for depth or fineness of pathos. But what gives him a place of his own, and the loftiest of its kind, is the vastness and intense vigour of his mind; the splendour of his thoughts and imagery, and the bold vehemence of his passion for the true and the sublime, under all their various forms. He does not thrill, but he exalts us. His genius is impetuous, exuberant, majestic; and a heavenly fire gleams through all his creations. He transports us into a holier and higher world than our own; everything around us breathes of force and solemn beauty.⁴⁹

We see here that Carlyle applies a distinctly sublime imagery to Schiller’s style, which is vast, ‘impetuous, exuberant, majestic’. Carlyle ascribes to Schiller’s aesthetics the qualities of ‘vastness’ and ‘force’, which, in Burke’s idiom, define the sublime against the beautiful. Crucially, the purpose of Schiller’s sublime style, which defines his genius, is to mediate the ‘holier and higher world’ to the reader. It is the ‘heavenly fire’ that Schiller’s writings aim to embody that is specifically the object of his sublime imagery.

Carlyle presents Schiller’s later historical works in continuity with his early philosophical pieces and dramas. The latter are seen as an immature expression of Schiller’s later genius developed with panache in his historical works (yet, Carlyle suggests, he never reached his full potential by refusing to write on the grand event of his times, the Revolution in France). Within this development, Carlyle focuses on the Protestant tradition, from which Schiller draws and which he embodies in his sublime aesthetics. Carlyle comments on the speech of Marquis Posa to King Carlos on the value of freedom and liberty in *Don Carlos*, noticing its revolutionary appeal: ‘Had the character of Posa been drawn ten years later, it would have been imputed, as all things are, to the ‘French Revolution;’ and Schiller himself perhaps might have been called a Jacobin.’⁵⁰ Posa, for Carlyle, is the sublime ‘Protestant’ hero of the drama: ‘Philip and Posa are antipodes in all respects. Philip thinks his new instructor is a Protestant; a charge which Posa rebuts with calm dignity, his object not being separation and

⁴⁹ *Works*, 25:78.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

contention, but union and peaceful gradual improvement.’⁵¹ The sublime and monumental posture of Posa embodies his liberal, ‘Protestant’ character:

It is pleasing to behold in Posa the deliberate expression of a great and good man’s sentiments on these ever-agitated subjects: a noble monument, embodying the liberal ideas of his age, in a form beautified by his own genius, and lasting as its other products.⁵²

To this description, however, Carlyle cautiously adds in a footnote Jean Paul Richter’s remark that Posa may in fact be no more than a misled prophet of freedom: ‘Jean Paul nevertheless, not without some show of reason, has compared this Posa to the tower of a lighthouse: “high, far-shining,— empty!”’.⁵³ Carlyle’s own sympathies remain divided between the liberal Posa on the one hand and Don Carlos, who attempts to flee Flanders from the despotism of his father, on the other.⁵⁴ He protests against the depiction of king Phillip, arguing that it is not sublime enough, and simultaneously demonstrates his thorough familiarity with Burke’s concept. Comparing Schiller’s version with the drama of Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), Carlyle concludes:

Alfieri has exhibited in his Filippo a picture of unequalled power. Obscurity is justly said to be essential to terror and sublimity; and Schiller has enfeebled the effect of his Tyrant, by letting us behold the most secret recesses of his spirit: we understand him better, but we fear him less. Alfieri does not show us the internal combination of Filippo: it is from its workings alone that we judge of his nature. Mystery, and the shadow of horrid cruelty, brood over his Filippo: it is only a transient word or act that gives us here and there a glimpse of his fierce, implacable, tremendous soul; a short and dubious glimmer that reveals to us the abysses of his being, dark, lurid, and terrific, ‘as the throat of the infernal Pool.’ Alfieri’s Filippo is perhaps the most wicked man that human imagination has conceived.⁵⁵

Alfieri’s use of darkness, obscurity and mystery, as opposed to Schiller’s minute depiction of Filippo’s character, reveal him as a master of the sublime mode, according to Carlyle. The main achievements of Alfieri’s imagery are the lack of clarity in the depiction of his hero, mystery and suspense, which suggest pictures to imagination, without providing detail. Schiller’s vague presentation allows the reader to ponder and

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ ‘The pity and love we are first taught to feel for Carlos abide with us to the last; and though Posa rises in importance as the piece proceeds, our admiration of his transcendent virtues does not obstruct the gentler feelings with which we look upon the fate of his friend.’ *Works*, 25:77.

⁵⁵ *Works*, 25:79.

imaginatively engage in fearful insights into Filippo's dark soul. The sublime emerges from Schiller's drama as the specific idiom of unlimited and dictatorial power, which connotes cruelty and fear.

Alfieri also emerges as a more capable user of the sublime mode of characterisation from Carlyle's juxtaposition of Alfieri's and Schiller's versions of *Jeanne D'Arc*. What becomes clear in Carlyle's description of the two, is that he considers Alfieri's supreme use of the sublime as an asset in the moral presentation of his drama (Carlyle will later call his own style in *The French Revolution*, 'a moral-sublime'⁵⁶). Alfieri's text is more spiritual and morally-insightful than Schiller's precisely because it is more sublime (Carlyle is re-using Burke's ideas that the natural reaction to divine mysteries is awe and terror rather than calm contemplation⁵⁷):

Schiller's moral force is commensurate with his intellectual gifts, and nothing more. The mind of the one is like the ocean, beautiful in its strength, smiling in the radiance of summer, and washing luxuriant and romantic shores: that of the other is like some black unfathomable lake placed far amid the melancholy mountains; bleak, solitary, desolate; but girdled with grim sky-piercing cliffs, overshadowed with storms, and illuminated only by the red glare of the lightning. Schiller is magnificent in his expansion, Alfieri is overpowering in his condensed energy; the first inspires us with greater admiration, the last with greater awe.⁵⁸

Schiller's early sublime productions are, according to Carlyle, marked by an undue fatalism. He reads both Schiller's *Philosophic Letters* and his acclaimed drama, *The Robbers*, marking the pitch of the German *Sturm und Drang* period, as Schiller's immature texts, since they do not acknowledge the reality of Christian grace and providence, which taints them with excessive pessimism about human destiny: 'Schiller has surveyed the dark Serbonian bog of Infidelity: but he has made no causeway through it: the *Philosophic Letters* are a fragment.'⁵⁹ Schiller's texts '[break] off abruptly without arriving at any conclusion.'⁶⁰ Carlyle's *Sartor*, which is his artistic answer to his studies in German philosophy and can also be read as a type of *Bildungsroman*, uses the metaphor of the Centre of Indifference for a state through which the main hero passes, before achieving a true spiritual assent (in Newman's

⁵⁶ *CME* 4:119.

⁵⁷ Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 56.

⁵⁸ *Works*, 25:80.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

understanding, as presented in the *Grammar of Assent* (1870)). Despite perceiving *The Robbers* an immature text, Carlyle acknowledges that ‘The publication of the *Robbers* forms an era not only in Schiller’s history, but in the Literature of the World.’ At the beginning of his critique Carlyle draws attention to the pessimism and lack of (Christian) hope in *The Robbers*, substituted by Schiller with a ‘grim inexpiable Fate’:

A grim inexpiable Fate is made the ruling principle: it envelops and overshadows the whole; and under its luring influence, the fiercest efforts of human will appear but like flashes that illuminate the wild scene with a brief and terrible splendour, and are lost forever in the darkness.⁶¹

This dark outlook, in Carlyle’s interpretation, is due primarily to Schiller’s immaturity (*The Robbers* was written when Schiller was only twenty-two) exemplified in the character of Karl von Moor:

Since the world is not the abode of unmixed integrity, he looks upon it as a den of thieves; since its institutions may obstruct the advancement of worth, and screen delinquency from punishment, he regards the social union as a pestilent nuisance, the mischiefs of which it is fitting that he in his degree should do his best to repair, by means however violent. [...] The original conception of such a work as this betrays the inexperience no less than the vigour of youth: its execution gives a similar testimony.⁶²

Despite this critique, Carlyle is clearly fascinated by Schiller’s main hero, whose sublime depiction he admires repeatedly: ‘but there is a towering grandeur about him, a whirlwind force of passion and of will, which catches our hearts, and puts the scruples of criticism to silence. [...] Strength, wild impassioned strength, is the distinguishing quality of Moor.’⁶³ What interests Carlyle most in *The Robbers* is the conflict between the rational and the aesthetic, which Schiller’s oeuvre stages, and the ultimate prevailing attraction of the sublime: ‘there is a perpetual conflict between our understanding and our feelings. Still, the latter on the whole come off victorious.’⁶⁴ This sublime Romantic appeal of Schiller’s drama, Carlyle believes, makes it a unique and revolutionary piece in the context of contemporary literary standards. Carlyle admiringly describes Schiller’s style as a ‘barbarian’ language scorned by contemporary (British) public: ‘It stands, in our imagination, like some ancient rugged pile of a barbarous age; irregular,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

fantastic, useless.’⁶⁵ Despite having criticised Schiller’s dark fatalism, he now anticipates the accusations in the *Anti-Jacobin* style that Schiller ‘injured the cause of morality by his work’, which he dismisses shortly by stating that Schiller’s

work has on the whole furnished nourishment to the more exalted powers of our nature; the sentiments and images which he has shaped and uttered, tend, in spite of their alloy, to elevate the soul to a nobler pitch: and this is a sufficient defence.⁶⁶

This spiritual assent (via sublime aesthetics) is, according to Carlyle, the chief merit of Schiller’s work, which should never be downplayed into any simplistic moral reading. The spiritual emerges here again as a privileged sphere in which Carlyle is interested, and which he believes to be missing in contemporary British writing. He ridicules the British conservative critique of German transcendentalism by arguing that every German spiritual thought constitutes no more than a little drop in the sea of British materialism and can by no means outbalance it:

As to the danger of misapplying the inspiration he communicates, [...] we have no great cause to fear it. Hitherto, at least, there has always been enough of dull reality, on every side of us, to abate such fervours in good time, and bring us back to the most sober level of prose, if not to sink us below it. We should thank the poet who performs such a service; and forbear to inquire too rigidly whether there is any ‘moral’ in his piece or not. The writer of a work, which interests and excites the spiritual feelings of men, has as little need to justify himself by showing how it exemplifies some wise saw or modern instance, as the doer of a generous action has to demonstrate its merit, by deducing it from the system of Shaftesbury, or Smith, or Paley.⁶⁷

Rather than a rejection of the moral dimension of his writings and an outright acceptance of Schiller’s aestheticised vision, Carlyle’s stance should be read here as a protest against the trite moralistic readings of the great Romantic authors, such as instanced by the strongly anti-Romantic *Edinburgh Review* and *The Westminster Review*.⁶⁸ Whereas these periodicals frequently adopt a bluntly utilitarian social and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁸ Compare for example the *Westminster*’s review of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, in which Hugo supposedly presents a morally-flawed reading of the society: ‘The scope of Victor Hugo’s teaching in this book, appears to be that vaguest, easiest, oldest lesson of second-class morality, that ‘society’ is responsible for the errors and wrongdoings of each individual member. [...] Would it really promote the morality of the world if we were to pay a greater homage, a deeper reverence to the woman who had succumbed to temptation than to her who had triumphed over it, because the former had, like Magdalen, thus proved that she loved? If this be not Victor Hugo’s moral, we are unable even to perceive the drift of

moral perspectives, whereby the moral of a literary text must be of social benefit, in Carlyle's traditional and conservative moral outlook, all texts are symbolic of deeper truths and render many morals, which go often against political party-divisions. German philosophy and Kant's sublime aesthetics are here presented as mediators of the spiritual dimension into Schiller's narrative. The sublime in Schiller's dramas emerges specifically as a literary *weapon* of stronger calibre against what Carlyle sees as the prevailing contemporary materialism, than a mere satire of political or moral nature on contemporary German and European affairs. Schiller's sublime conveys a strong and intoxicating dose of the spiritual into a remarkably 'dull reality' of a distinctly non-spiritual nature of late eighteenth-century Germany (and nineteenth-century Britain):

Ridicule, he signifies, has long been tried against the wickedness of the times, whole cargoes of hellebore have been expended,— in vain; and now, he thinks, recourse must be had to more pungent medicines. We may smile at the simplicity of this idea; and safely conclude that, like other specifics, the present one would fail to produce a perceptible effect: but Schiller's vindication rests on higher grounds than these. His work has on the whole furnished nourishment to the more exalted powers of our nature.⁶⁹

Let us briefly note here that all these insights will be later developed into Carlyle's own literary manifesto in the 'Signs of the Times' (1829), where he criticises his age for its lack of a valid spiritual perspective and its unreflective cult of utilitarianism and purely institutional solutions to deep ethical problems, as well as for its rejection of the supernatural roots of ethics:

This is not a Religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and Good; but a calculation of the Profitable. Worship, indeed, in any sense, is not recognised among us, or is mechanically explained into Fear of pain, or Hope of pleasure. Our true Deity is Mechanism.⁷⁰

his teaching. [...] All this we know; where we fail to prove our knowledge in practice, it is surely not because of our ignorance. The problem which we have to solve is the reconciliation of the philosophical doctrine of necessity with that of individual responsibility. We may never arrive at a theoretical solution, but we are compelled every day to attempt to solve the difficulty in some rude way, and the man deserves well of the world who helps us in any degree to a more satisfactory method of accomplishing the task.' Justin McCarthy, 'Victor Hugo', *Westminster Review* (1863); 23:1; 77-114 (p. 113).

⁶⁹ *Works*, 25:23.

⁷⁰ *CME* 2:111.

Similarly to Schiller, Carlyle posits here the aesthetic emphasis on the beautiful alongside ethics, as the opposite of the British utilitarian cult of the beneficial. This is inscribed within Carlyle's leading theme of the lack of a spiritual dimension in nineteenth-century Britain. In what follows, Carlyle develops his leading metaphor of 'machinery', which illustrates the abandonment of the spiritual in contemporary times:

Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. Here too nothing follows its spontaneous course, nothing is left to be accomplished by old natural methods. Everything has its cunningly devised implements, its preestablished apparatus; it is not done by hand, but by machinery.⁷¹

Carlyle presents the concept of a 'mechanical society' as one in which the use of free will and conscience are abandoned, giving way to the cult of law and purely institutional, 'technical' (understood as purpose-oriented or procedural) answers to moral dilemmas. This is a well-rehearsed theme in Scottish Calvinist-inspired tradition, which is specifically sensitive to the loss of personal responsibility and, consequentially, of the distinction between good and evil. Carlyle posits the contemporary cult of 'the mechanical', procedural solutions in opposition to the cultivation of human conscience which is solely able to distinguish between good and evil. In Carlyle's analogical perspective, moral dilemmas call for a powerful imaginative and intellectual effort of human conscience and are open to the intervention of divine grace which is mysterious and unpredictable:

Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions, for Mechanism of one sort or other, do they hope and struggle. Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical character.⁷²

Carlyle sees German metaphysical philosophy as the legitimate continuator of the Scottish common sense moral thought, capable of reigniting the ethical and spiritual discussion in Britain:

The French were the first to desert Metaphysics [...] Among ourselves, the Philosophy of Mind, after a rickety infancy, which never reached the vigour of manhood, fell suddenly into decay, languished and finally died out, with its last amiable cultivator, Professor Stewart. In no nation but

⁷¹ *CME* 2:101.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Germany has any decisive effort been made in psychological science; not to speak of any decisive result.⁷³

German philosophy once again, then, is seen as a worthy continuator of the Scottish Enlightenment's moral discussion (and, in Carlyle's Germanophile bias, as the only legitimate one). Establishing a literary connection with German Romantic thought promises to channel to Britain the renewal of interest in the 'grand secrets of Necessity and Freewill [...] of our mysterious relations to Time and Space, to God, to the Universe.'⁷⁴ Carlyle is rehearsing here the grand Enlightenment debate on the questions of free will and morality. According to Hobbes, moral good and evil have no place outside civilised society, whereas the Scottish school of Hutcheson posited the existence of moral sense in all humanity, regardless of one's cultural or historical background.⁷⁵ In this light the question that Carlyle is asking in *The French Revolution* can be read as: Is the French Revolution ethically legible despite its apparent institutional annihilation of all moral reference; or is it a purely aesthetically sublime moment in history falling outside all comprehensibility (in Schiller's vision of aesthetics as a moment of disconnection from the ethical)?

Unlike in his late writings, Carlyle's tone in 'The Signs of the Times' is light and hopeful as he compares the dominating British 'mechanical' moral and spiritual attitudes to Sir Hudibras's ludicrous theories of things earthly and divine: 'We enjoy, we see nothing by direct vision; but only by reflection, and in anatomical dismemberment. Like Sir Hudibras, for every *Why* we must have a *Wherefore*. We have our little theory on all human and divine things.'⁷⁶ Carlyle's choice of the seventeenth-century mock heroic narrative poem upon Puritans, Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663, 1664, and 1678) as his critical stance is of paramount importance for the argument which this thesis develops about Carlyle's complex and highly self-critical perspective on his native Puritan tradition. 'The Signs of the Times' can be read as Carlyle's emphatic defence of free will. The conclusion is hopeful and light. It is man's own theoretical constructions that hold him a prisoner and give him an appearance of a lifeless and determined agent, devoid of free agency. All that remains is to free oneself

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁷⁵ Cf. 'Method, moral sense, and the problem of diversity: Francis Hutcheson and the Scottish Enlightenment' in Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 150-199.

⁷⁶ *CME* 2:113.

from such faulty narratives in order to regain the spiritual freedom which we seem to have lost under strict and unrealistic ('mechanical') models of thinking:

if Mechanism, like some glass bell, encircles and imprisons us; if the soul looks forth on a fair heavenly country which it cannot reach, and pines, and in its scanty atmosphere is ready to perish, — yet the bell is but of glass, 'one bold stroke to break the bell in pieces, and thou art delivered!'⁷⁷

In one crucial sense Carlyle's theory goes back to the orthodox Protestant Whig vision of the Revolution, instanced in Richard Price's interpretation, and reads it as another embodiment of the historical Reformation (of which the Glorious Revolution, in traditional pre-Revolution Whig reading, was a legitimate continuator), and a spiritual as well as an aesthetic and political event in human history:

The Reformation had an invisible, mystic and ideal aim; the result was indeed to be embodied in external things; but its spirit, its worth, was internal, invisible, infinite. Our English Revolution too originated in Religion. Men did battle, in those old days, not for Purse-sake, but for Conscience-sake. Nay, in our own days, it is no way different. The French Revolution itself had something higher in it than cheap bread and a Habeas-corpus act. Here too was an Idea; a Dynamic, not a Mechanic force. It was a struggle, though a blind and at last an insane one, for the infinite, divine nature of Right, of Freedom, of Country.⁷⁸

Deeply rooted in the political theology of the Protestant tradition, this reading proposes that the Revolution was a legitimate moral and political phenomenon, because it was founded in human conscience. This is a distinctly 'old' argument which in the 1830s is already long out of political and literary use. Its explosive political and ethical potential will be examined more closely in the following chapters, but just now, let us notice that in this light Carlyle's most fundamental and profound insight into the Revolution is only intelligible from within the Christian ethical and cultural code. Similarly to Burke, Carlyle believes that morality is deeply inscribed in culture and meddling with it can have fatal consequences (because humanity is far less rational than the Revolutionary leaders believed).

Let us come back to *The Life of Schiller*. Carlyle presents Schiller's change from drama to history-writing as a natural development of his sublime aesthetics:

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.116-117.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[I]n the sublimest flights of his genius, intellect is a quality as conspicuous as any other [...] For a time [Schiller] had hesitated what to choose; at length he began to think of History. As a leading object of pursuit, this promised him peculiar advantages. It was new to him; and fitted to employ some of his most valuable gifts. It was grounded on reality, for which, as we have said, his taste was now becoming stronger.⁷⁹

The 'higher ground' from which the historian examines his/her materials is something that Carlyle will come to question in his historical essays written in the 1830s, together with the idea of the development of fixed historical laws which the historian is expected to uncover for the reader. In Carlyle's later writings the historian becomes so involved in the intricate web of myth-making, that his own interpretation becomes merely one of many textual constructions which the reader must account for. What Carlyle does learn from Schiller's vision is the sympathetic 'enlargement of feelings' and the broad ethical dimension of history (spelled out most prominently in Schiller's conception of theatre):

In his view, the business of history is not merely to record, but to interpret; it involves not only a clear conception and a lively exposition of events and characters, but a sound, enlightened theory of individual and national morality, a general philosophy of human life, whereby to judge of them, and measure their effects. The historian now stands on higher ground, takes in a wider range than those that went before him; he can now survey vast tracts of human action, and deduce its laws from an experience extending over many climes and ages. With his ideas, moreover, his feelings ought to be enlarged: he should regard the interests not of any sect or state, but of mankind; the progress not of any class of arts or opinions, but of universal happiness and refinement.⁸⁰

Expounding on Schiller's idea of universal history, Carlyle writes:

It is a poor and little aim to write for one nation; a philosophic spirit cannot tolerate such limits [...] The most powerful nation is but a fragment; and thinking minds will not grow warm on its account, except in so far as this nation or its fortunes have been influential on the progress of the species. [...] And for a thinker of the present day, it is equally natural to measure the occurrences of history by quite a different standard: by their influence upon the general destiny of man, their tendency to obstruct or to forward him in his advancement towards liberty, knowledge, true religion and dignity of mind.⁸¹

We see here Schiller's progressivist historical agenda, which Carlyle comes to radically oppose in *The French Revolution*. Already in his essay on Schiller, Carlyle tentatively

⁷⁹ *Works*, 25:84.

⁸⁰ *Works*, 25:100-101.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101-2.

questions Schiller's historical-aesthetic agenda of 'the progress of the species' by linking it to the (Whig) discourse of moral progress. Carlyle's main argument against Schiller is drawn from ethics, signalling that Carlyle recognises the moral dimension of Schiller's theory of progress. Significantly, though, Carlyle phrases his critique in the aesthetical language so fundamental to Schiller's own theory. In a clever move that attacks Schiller's position from within his own aesthetic theory, Carlyle argues that 'universal history' is ultimately an aesthetically unrealistic project because it does not allow for the natural working of human imagination and sympathy. Schiller's historical aesthetics are, for Carlyle, too far removed from 'our particular affections':

Universal philanthropy forms but a precarious and very powerless rule of conduct; and the 'progress of the species' will turn out equally unfitted for deeply exciting the imagination. It is not with freedom that we can sympathise, but with free men. There ought, indeed, to be in history a spirit superior to petty distinctions and vulgar partialities; our particular affections ought to be enlightened and purified; but they should not be abandoned. [...] Perhaps, in a certain sense, the surest mode of pleasing and instructing all nations *is* to write for one.⁸²

Carlyle links here again the ethical, aesthetical and historical dimensions of Schiller's project, while suggesting that universal history as well as 'universal philanthropy' are too utopian agendas to follow in a realistic spirit. Rather than a denial of a universal moral appeal of his writing, Carlyle puts forward a Romantic ideal of mediating the universal via focusing on a national history as a single entity. Schiller's vision, Carlyle suggests, is potentially morally-suspect, as well as being aesthetically barren (unimaginative).

Schiller's aesthetic programme is reflected in a specifically suspect imagery in *Sartor*, where Carlyle presents the elevated, utopian and 'sublime' philanthropy of the German Professor of Things in General, residing in his 'German Temple of Honour' (in the utopian 'no place', 'Weissnichtwo', German for 'Kennaquhair') as both alluring and morally-twisted tongue, because it is detached from the world below him. The Editor praises Teufelsdröckh for his

independent Germanism and Philanthropy (*derben Kerndeutschheit und Menschenliebe*); which will not, assuredly, pass current without opposition in high places; but must and will exalt the almost new name of

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Teufelsdröckh to the first ranks of Philosophy in our German Temple of Honour.⁸³

Carlyle, however, smugly delivers his critique of the German Professor, by means of an intended typo when Teufelsdröckh accosts the Editor with the words: ‘*Ah, mein Leiber*’ (German for ‘my body’ or perhaps ‘stomach’) corrected in later editions of *Sartor* to ‘*Mein Lieber*’ (my dear).⁸⁴ Given Teufelsdröckh’s suggestive choice of imagery, by which he depicts the humanity below him as salted fish in a barrel, there is no mistaking which of the two meanings suits Teufelsdröckh’s dangerous philosophical appetites better. Carlyle’s pun discloses that the Professor may not be the one who *loves* humanity (German for a philanthropist, ‘*Menschenliebe*’), but, quite on the contrary, a hypocrite and a misanthrope. The typo may also echo ‘*Leibhaftiger*’ (‘Embodied’) which traditionally refers to the devil, and also figures large in Carlyle’s spiritual vocabulary as an emblem of the complex relation between the spiritual and the physical in this world:

‘*Ach, mein Leiber!*’ said he once, at midnight, when we had returned from the Coffee-house in rather earnest talk, ‘it is a true sublimity to dwell here. These fringes of lamplight, struggling up through smoke and thousand-fold exhalation, some fathoms into the ancient reign of Night, what thinks Bootes of them, as he leads his Hunting-Dogs over the Zenith in their leash of sidereal fire?’⁸⁵

Reverting in *sublime disgust* from the ‘sick Life’ beneath him, Teufelsdröckh directs his sight instead to the starry heaven above in another linguistic joke on Kant’s famous motto: ‘The starry heaven above me and the moral law within me.’ The constellations which Teufelsdröckh contemplates are, fittingly, the chase led by Bootes or Arctophylax (Greek for ‘bear-watcher’), who sends his hungry and ferocious dogs on the female naked body of his mother, the goddess Calisto, transformed into a she-bear, by Zeus’s jealous wife, Hera, in punishment for her husband’s infidelity. In this disturbing sexual imagery, Teufelsdröckh’s sublime appetite is presented as a case of an aesthetic rape of the sleeping body of the city below him. Similarly to Arctophylax, from his sublime position Teufelsdröckh is engaged in projecting his ferocious philosophy on the sleeping and unaware citizens. His voyeuristic penetration into the insights of people’s houses transforms the city into a giant hellish bee-hive, in which

⁸³ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. by Mark Engel and Rodger L. Tarr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 6.

⁸⁴ Compare *SR*, ‘Introduction’, p. xxii.

⁸⁵ *SR*: 17.

humans are seen swarming in their earthly appetites, while the Professor's surgeon-like imagination literally unskins them, revealing to the hungry Professor their naked souls. This can be read as a pun on Schiller's concept of 'beautiful souls', suggesting that the German's aesthete's rejection of the body has potentially fatal consequences in Carlyle's vision:⁸⁶

I look down into all that wasp-nest or bee-hive [...] and witness their wax-laying and honey-making, and poison-brewing, and choking by sulphur. [...] Couriers arrive bestrapped and bebooted, bearing Joy and Sorrow bagged up in pouches of leather.⁸⁷

Contemporary readers apparently had no difficulty in recognising devilish operations in Teufelsdröckh's voyeuristic gaze into their private physical and spiritual matters. A reviewer in *The Yale Literary Magazine* in 1842 comments, closely imitating Carlyle's style:

It was thus, with himself for a centre and the whole habitable world for a circumference, he would, not only with expedition of *Diabille Boileaux* [*sic*], unroof the surrounding tenements of brick and mortar, but, with a more skilful *diablerie*, unclothe the surrounding composites of flesh and fustian, and subject to an honest analysis their be-tailored nakedness.⁸⁸

The author appears to refer to *Le Diable Boiteux* (1707) by Alain-René Lesage (a later version of *El Diablo Cojuelo* (1641) by Luis Vélez de Guevara), used as a reference both in the British and French literary constructions of the post-revolutionary French landscape.⁸⁹ In Lesage's novel, the devil proposes to his victim a free flight over the sky from where he is shown the insides of people's houses (and partially also their souls). Crucially, this voyeurism is presented humorously as a demonic manoeuvre, which usurps the divine look into the private, which should not be accessed by any curious onlookers. The devil's tempting is easily read as rooted in the sinful human desire to step beyond its demesne and judge of what must be left to the Divine insight only. The devil promises to his victim:

⁸⁶ Compare the Gothic imagery in *The French Revolution*: 'Still deeper into one's heart goes that Tannery at Meudon; not mentioned among the other miracles of tanning! 'At Meudon,' says Montgaillard with considerable calmness, 'there was a Tannery of Human Skins; such of the Guillotined as seemed worth flaying: of which perfectly good wash-leather was made:' for breeches, and other uses. The skin of the men, he remarks, was superior in toughness (consistance) and quality to shamoy; that of women was good for almost nothing, being so soft in texture! (*Montgaillard, iv. 290.*)—' *Fr. Rev.*, III: 247.

⁸⁷ *SR*: 16.

⁸⁸ D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Cf. David Lawrence Pike, 'The Devil Comes to Town', *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (London: Cornell University Press, 2007).

In consequence of the power I possess as a demon, I will strip off the tops of the houses of this great city; and notwithstanding the shades of the night, you shall see what passes within them, as clearly as if it were noon-day. [...] I want to render it useful to you; and by giving you a perfect insight into the characters of the different persons, to explain those parts they are now acting on this stage of your world; and by discovering the most inward and hidden motives, disclose the true and real sources of human actions.⁹⁰

As it turns out, though, in tune with Lesage's gentle Renaissance humour, *The Devil on the Crutches* (*diable boiteux*) describes himself as a 'a good Catholic', 'the Demon of luxury, or, to speak more honourably of myself, the god Cupid',⁹¹ who delights in making economically and socially unacceptable matches between members of incompatible social classes of the eighteenth-century society:

As for me, my function is different from all these, my province being to make matches between old dotards and young girls, masters and their maids, and to couple young ladies of small fortunes with passionate lovers that are not worth a groat. It was I that first introduced into the world luxury, debauch, gaming-tables, and the philosopher's stone. I claim the honour likewise of having first brought into vogue dancing, music, farce, revelling, drums, routs, beatups, and all the other fashionable modes of France. In a word, Sir, my name is Asmodeus, alias, The devil upon crutches.⁹²

Rather than inducing evil, this Catholic devil, then, appears to be interested in challenging the existing political and social divisions through the power of love and does not seem to be satisfied by accomplishing evil, but instead, he claims: 'I chuse rather to sting than quiet people's consciences.'⁹³ Despite (or perhaps precisely because of) Asmodeus's multiple machinations, true love in a Christian way gently wins confirming the operation of the Divine grace in this world.

While drawing from Lesage's humour, which he knew well,⁹⁴ Carlyle's take on this Catholic representation of the devil becomes more sinister, because he reads him through the lenses of what he sees as the best modern depiction of the devil, Goethe's

⁹⁰ Alain-René Lesage, *The Devil upon Crutches*, tr. by Tobias Smollett, ed. by O. M. Brack, Jr. and Leslie A. Chilton (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 19.

⁹¹ Lesage, p. 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ Compare Carlyle's letters: 'I do not say that Byron took the idea (of the wicked and clever remarks in "Don Juan") from Mephistopheles; it is unhappily easy for many a one to find such ideas nearer home if he is blackguard enough to indulge in them. I only meant to say that Byron might have found his fundamental conception realised already in Goethe's play. *The Diable Boiteux* (of Le Sage) is a very pretty little fellow but no devil, rather a smirking little French Abbé.' *CL* 2:58-59.

Mephistopheles. The mixture of the two, already registered in *Sartor*, will be developed fully in *The French Revolution*, where Carlyle will provocatively propose to the reader (in Mephistophelian style) a faulty deal of a free ‘Asmodeus’s Flight’ to examine the panorama over fighting France: ‘this Paris Pandemonium, or City of All the Devils!— [...] Could the Reader take an Asmodeus’s Flight, and waving open all roofs and privacies, look down from the Tower of Notre Dame, what a Paris were it!’.⁹⁵ The moral undertones of Carlyle’s devilish look seem to be that Britain’s vision of French history is wrong, because it voyeuristically scrutinises what should remain veiled and read sympathetically rather than demonically. Carlyle’s Gothic depiction of the Revolution in this sense is an interestingly corrupt and suspect idiom in itself, which can be read both as Mark Cumming did,⁹⁶ as an expression of Carlyle’s deep fascination with the Gothic genre (which Carlyle ostensibly denied), as well as a conscious manoeuvre to examine the very demons which trouble the British psyche. In a crucial sense, the demonic Gothic depiction is a challenge to the Whig morally-disinterested presentation of history as advancement of an inhuman ‘historical force’. The insight that Carlyle takes both from Lesage and from the Scottish Calvinist tradition is that it is crucial to constantly examine and challenge one’s deepest and most profound demons, which, in the end, frequently turn out to be the opposite of what they appeared at the beginning.

One crucial trait in *Sartor*’s depiction of ‘Asmodeus’s Flight’ is his reminiscence to the image of the absolute sovereign as envisioned in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. This is a typically Carlylean move of humorously re-inscribing his political and philosophical deliberations into a Christian moral perspective. Hobbes’s argument against Locke is that the pre-political state is amoral (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), which justifies the sovereign’s absolute authority and precludes the citizens’ right to rebel against a corrupt government. In Carlyle’s rendition, Hobbes’s philosophical gaze outsteps its morally-acceptable boundaries, and, by disrobing humanity of its ethical attire, enters a distinctly demonic sphere. This context is crucial to the debate initiated in *Sartor*, because Teufelsdröckh, the eponymous *tailor* (Lat. *sartor*) of the novel is also in a sense a figure and artistic reflection of Robespierre. Already in *Sartor*, then, the question about the

⁹⁵ *FR* II: 291.

⁹⁶ Cf. Mark Cumming, *A Disimprisoned Epic: Form and Vision in Carlyle's French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); and Mary Desaulniers, *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror: A Study of Revisionary Gothicism in 'The French Revolution'* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

right of the French to rebel is introduced artistically. The ultimate act of the descent of the *tailor* (and implicitly also of the author, given the autobiographical side of the novel) in order to join the rebellion suggests that he supports the revolutionary ideal, yet the demonic Hobbesian nature of Teufelsdröckh presages the bloody progress of the revolution.

Rather than embracing Hobbes's position, as we have already suggested, Carlyle is attempting to recover Hutcheson's ideal of moral sense as essential to human nature. In his study, *The Victorian Sage*, John Holloway places Carlyle along John Henry Newman (1801–1890), based on their broad concept of reason as well as their use of imagination in place of a purely logical argument: their 'answers offer themselves to imagination rather than logic.'⁹⁷ Newman's catholic concept of reason in the *Grammar of Assent* is in fact not too far from Carlyle's project of looking for a rational basis for faith. Carlyle in *Sartor* is well aware of the fideistic tradition of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, whose *salto mortale* he implicitly performs (a dangerous jump from his religious doubts to faith),⁹⁸ but the 'Everlasting Yea' is Carlyle's attempt to reach true assent and a firm rational grounding for his spirituality (hence the numerous pontifical metaphors meant to express the bridging of the gap between the natural and the supernatural). Whereas seemingly *Sartor* argues for an absolute relativity of values (depicted, after Montesquieu and Herder as changing cultural 'attires', varying with every epoch of human development), implicitly the philosophical debate within the text stages a search for the 'Everlasting Yea' (Newman's spiritual assent) and a protest against such an utter volatility of all moral values, which Carlyle's Centre of Indifference (a state between the denial and assent) represents.

In his *Life of Schiller* Carlyle suggests that Schiller's aesthetic position emerges as a result of his disillusionment with the French Revolution. His reading is also insightful in stressing that Schiller's philosophy is a continuation of his earlier liberal and revolutionary spirit, to which the French Revolution poses a serious problem. Carlyle draws the reader's attention to the fact that Schiller in 1792 considered mingling in politics and writing an appeal to the French population in the 'voice of reason advocating liberty as well as order':

⁹⁷ John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965), p. 4.

⁹⁸ Compare: *SR*: 187. 'Here therefore properly it is that the Philosophy of Clothes attains to Transcendentalism; this last leap, can we but clear it, takes us safe into the promised land, where *Palingenesia*, in all senses, may be considered as beginning.'

The French Revolution had from the first affected him with no ordinary hopes; which, however, the course of events, particularly the imprisonment of Louis, were now fast converting into fears. For the ill-fated monarch, and the cause of freedom, which seemed threatened with disgrace in the treatment he was likely to receive, Schiller felt so deeply interested, that he had determined, in his case a determination not without its risks, to address an appeal on these subjects to the French people and the world at large. The voice of reason advocating liberty as well as order might still, he conceived, make a salutary impression in this period of terror and delusion [...].⁹⁹

By stressing Schiller's desire to write as a 'voice of reason', Carlyle suggests that, in the wake of the Revolution, Schiller sees such a rational position as no longer immediately available in the depiction of French history. The French terror, in Carlyle's interpretation, does not weaken Schiller's attachment to liberty, but rather shifts his aesthetics towards a 'more respectful feeling towards old establishments' and customs (again, this can perhaps be seen more accurately as an echo of Burke's attitude towards the Revolution, than a direct description of Schiller's position). Crucially, for Carlyle, it is the Revolution which leads Schiller to reject all his former belief in human perfectibility:

In a few months, Louis perished on the scaffold [...]. Schiller turned away from these repulsive and appalling scenes, into other regions where his heart was more familiar [...] The French Revolution had distressed and shocked him; but it did not lessen his attachment to liberty, the name of which had been so desecrated in its wild convulsions. Perhaps in his subsequent writings we can trace a more respectful feeling towards old establishments; more reverence for the majesty of Custom; and with an equal zeal, a weaker faith in human perfectibility [...].¹⁰⁰

Given that Schiller's own thinking is clearly more utopian than Carlyle presents it here, we may assume that he is tempering Schiller's thought from a Burkean position, which prioritises tradition and established order in direct opposition to the idea of man's moral 'perfectibility' which Schiller, despite Carlyle's protestations, seems to have largely endorsed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Works* 25:120.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Compare, for example, Richard Eldridge on Schiller's aesthetics: 'The key idea in Schiller's aesthetics is a utopian vision of human perfectibility. Humankind can become better, freer, more beautiful, more fulfilled. The task of art is to ennoble us, to help us overcome the split between nature and freedom, so that the whole of human nature can find full and free expression. Schiller's 'Ideal' – the vision that poetry and art is supposed to convey to us – is an ample and generous one, a picture of a fully harmonious

From Schiller's *Revolt of the Netherlands*, Carlyle picks out two depictions which he describes as 'living pictures' of the Revolution, presented in a picturesque and Romantic style. Both are praised for their impressive presentation of the liberal quest and are subsequently compared directly with Madame de Staël's depiction of the French Revolution. The suggestion is clear: Schiller's aesthetic concept of universal history and his sublime theory should have found their proper subject in the depiction of what Carlyle already begins to consider as the most important contemporary event:

Two fragments alone, the *Siege of Antwerp*, and the *Passage of Alba's Army*, both living pictures, show us still farther what he might have done had he proceeded. The surpassing and often highly-picturesque movements of this War, the devotedness of the Dutch, their heroic achievement of liberty, were not destined to be painted by the glowing pen of Schiller, whose heart and mind were alike so qualified to do them justice.¹⁰²

In a footnote Carlyle notices that what Schiller never fulfilled in his depiction of the Dutch fight for freedom is achieved in Staël's *Considérations sur la révolution française* (1818):

If we mistake not, Madame de Staël, in her *Revolution Francaise*, had this performance of Schiller's in her eye. Her work is constructed on a similar though a rather looser plan of arrangement: the execution of it bears the same relation to that of Schiller; it is less irregular; more ambitious in its rhetoric; inferior in precision, though often not in force of thought and imagery.¹⁰³

The implicit reading here is that, for Carlyle, not only the Dutch revolt but also the French Revolution form part of what Schiller depicts as *universal history*, which in 'What Is, and to What End Do We Study, Universal History?' (1789) Schiller presents as distinctly moral in concern:

The realm of history is fertile and comprehensive; it embraces the whole moral world. It accompanies man through everything he experiences, through all the changing forms of thought, through his folly and wisdom, his depravity and glory; it must render the account of everything he has given and received.¹⁰⁴

human being, fully free and fully at home in the world.' Richard Eldridge, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 276.

¹⁰² *Works* 25:96.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Compare: Schiller, 'What Is, and to What End Do We Study, Universal History?', *History and Theory*, 11:3 (1972), 321-334, p. 322.

Carlyle sees the French Revolution, as well as the Thirty-Years' war, as having a universal, moral meaning for humanity:

Besides, the Thirty-Years War is a subject in which nationality of feeling may be even wholly spared, better than in almost any other. It is not a German but a European subject; it forms the concluding portion of the Reformation, and this is an event belonging not to any country in particular, but to the human race.¹⁰⁵

We see here the beginnings of what will become Carlyle's project of interpreting French history as a lens or an allegory through which to look at European history or even, in a more general sense, at all human history. In challenge to the narrow British political readings of the Revolution, Carlyle proposes a distinctly larger symbolic and moral perspective, which can be legible to and sympathised with (in the Scottish Enlightenment broad moral vision) by everyone. Schiller is also an inspiration for Carlyle in terms of thinking about the Revolution not only as a moral tale, but specifically as an epic poem. Drawing attention to Schiller's definition of the eighteenth-century epic poem, Carlyle notes that, similarly to his project of writing 'a rational commentary' on the French Revolution, Schiller never fully realised his plans of writing from an 'infinitely higher' epic and spiritual perspective on the recent French history. Carlyle quotes from Schiller's correspondence:

An epic poem in the eighteenth century should be quite a different thing from such a poem in the childhood of the world. And it is that very circumstance which attracts me so much towards this project. Our manners, the finest essence of our philosophies, our politics, economy, arts, in short, of all we know and do, would require to be introduced without constraint, and interwoven in such a composition, to live there in beautiful harmonious freedom, as all the branches of Greek culture live and are made visible in Homer's *Iliad*.¹⁰⁶

The debate with Schiller channels for Carlyle not only the sublime Burkean historiographic perspective, but also, specifically, the focus on the French Revolution as a subject worthy of sublime depiction. Although Schiller planned to tackle it in a 'voice of reason advocating liberty as well as order', and although he developed intricate post-revolutionary aesthetics to represent the Revolution, he never realised his plans (which Carlyle, in the 1830s, sees as still unrealised). In the next chapter we will examine Carlyle's attempt at implementing Schiller's aesthetics within the structure of a moral

¹⁰⁵ *Works* 25:103.

¹⁰⁶ *Works* 25:118.

tale, 'The Diamond Necklace', which he designs as a sketch anticipating *The French Revolution*.

Chapter 4: 'Ite, Missa Est': Carlyle and the Devil

In previous chapter we traced Carlyle's complex involvement with Schiller's aesthetics, which is informed by his Calvinist spirituality on the one hand, and Enlightenment moral philosophy on the other. This chapter will examine the continuation of this theme and Carlyle's artistic response, 'The Diamond Necklace' (1837), presented as a Romantic moral tale.

In his essay on Walter Scott (1838), Carlyle corrects the Enlightenment maxim of history as 'philosophy teaching by experience' by lessening the role of philosophy and increasing the value of Romantic experience. Theoretical analysis of facts is assigned an altogether humbler role of silently following experience and *embodying* it faithfully (Schiller's 'living picture') in a narrative which allows for the reader's imaginative and sympathetic response:

These [Scott's] Historical Novels have taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others, till so taught: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies and abstractions of men. Not abstractions were they, not diagrams and theorems; but men, [...] History will henceforth have to take thought of it. Her faint hearsays of 'philosophy teaching by experience' will have to exchange themselves everywhere for direct inspection and embodiment: this, and this only, will be counted experience; and till once experience have got it, philosophy will reconcile herself to wait at the door.¹

The main role of historiography for Carlyle increasingly becomes to present history as an experience with which the reader is able to sympathise.² We can recognise some of the critical tools that Carlyle already used in his reading of Schiller. Carlyle reads Scott's writings as deeply inspired the Scottish Presbyterian moral code:

Nobody who knows Scotland and Scott can doubt but Presbyterianism too had a vast share in the forming of him. A country where the entire people

¹ *CME* 4: 176-177. Chris Vanden Bossche compares Carlyle's critique of Schiller to Thomas Macaulay's statement that: 'History, it has been said, is philosophy teaching by examples. Unhappily what the philosophy gains in soundness and depth, the examples generally lose in vividness.' Thomas Carlyle, *Historical Essays*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 453.

² On the influence of Scott on Thomas Babington Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle compare: Andrew Sanders, 'History' in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 405-421.

is, or even once has been, laid hold of, filled to the heart with an infinite religious idea, has 'made a step from which it cannot retrograde.'³

Carlyle's crucial insight here is that Presbyterianism marks a valid and irremovable part of Scottish culture, an argument which we will see him broaden to Christianity in Europe. No historical experience, in Carlyle's opinion, can be easily erased from human memory, and, when such attempts are made, it is destined to return under a repressed, Gothic form.⁴

Another source from which Carlyle derives this stress on the individual and on the concrete in history is his intense reading of the biblical narratives at the time of writing *The French Revolution*. His letters document his juxtaposing of the biblical narratives with the events of the French Revolution in an attempt to find an adequate moral and spiritual positions for his historiography. The Bible is also an important source of the sublime grammar, which we already saw to be Carlyle's chosen mode of writing about the Revolution:

I read no Books whatever, except pieces of the Bible and—the *Histoire Parlementaire*. Of the Bible I seem to get more and more understanding, deeper and deeper reverence. It is a Book written by men that *knew* the thing they were writing. Who could fancy there were such a worth in that; and yet there is. Of the 'Hist. Parl.' and whole *French Revolution a History in three Books* I make exceedingly little at present. Miserable does it seem, miserable I in the midst of it. The whole Business lies round me in vague cloudy masses; far, very far from living form.⁵

Carlyle's conviction that history should be read as a moral lesson and that it reveals the workings of the divine can be related to Coleridge's ideas expressed in the *Lay Sermons* (1816-1817) where Coleridge talks about 'the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal'⁶ and the need of the intellectual elites to challenge the ethics of commerce and philosophical materialism with a more traditional religious and ethical thought. In the *Lay Sermons* the Bible is envisioned as a textbook of state wisdom, and a guide for public life as much as for private one. The prophetic writing of history is, according to Coleridge, the 'collation of the present with the past, in the habit of thoughtfully assimilating the events of our own age to those of the time before us',⁷ while the

³ *Works*, 4: 150.

⁴ Compare Mary Desaulniers's reading of the Gothic Christian symbolisms in *The French Revolution*.

⁵ *CL* 8: 248-251.

⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons* (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), p. 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

prophet is a religious oracle who derives his political and social wisdom from the study of Christian sacred books. Coleridge's stated aim is 'to urge men so qualified to apply their powers and attainments to an especial study of the Old Testament as teaching the elements of political science.'⁸ Carlyle is greatly influenced by Coleridge's 'prophetic' biblical reading of the French Revolution, which he creatively examines in his historiography. Also Coleridge's thoughts on the action of Providence in history in reference to the dilemma of free will can be seen reflected in Carlyle's thought. He also to an extent shares Coleridge's vision of the Revolution as a castigation of the aristocratic rulers of France, but ultimately develops a much more complex, nuanced, and inconclusive perspective in *The French Revolution*. Specifically Coleridge's personal reading to the French Revolution is arguably deeply challenged in Carlyle's work. Coleridge writes:

[T]he Prophet revealed the true philosophy of the French Revolution more than two thousand years before it became a sad irrevocable truth of history. [...] *thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, none seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee.*⁹

Whereas Coleridge uses the biblical scripts to provide an authoritative reading of the Revolution, Carlyle juxtaposes biblical narratives with the revolutionary ones, allowing them to question and challenge one another. In this view, every 'prophetic interpretation' is ultimately unsatisfactory in Carlyle's inconclusive reading. This is reflected in the chaotic narrative where the king, the mob, and Robespierre in turns imagine themselves to be in control of the events, and they are ultimately proven wrong because they all fail to see the larger historical forces at play. Similarly, the prophetic readings of the great literary men and women of Britain and Europe fall short of truth because Providence is in Carlyle's belief too mysterious to be ever fully grasped (indeed, it is more often misunderstood than not, in his sarcastic worldview).

In another letter to John Stuart Mill, Carlyle argues with Mill's utilitarian progressivist ideology from an orthodox Christian standpoint. He juxtaposes Mill's abstract theory with the Christian stress on the individual and rejects the doctrines of the 'good of the species' and the 'happiness of the greatest number', by arguing that it is practically impossible to sympathise with the happiness of all humanity. He translates Mill's doctrine, which he sees as unrealistically operating on the abstract level of figures

⁸ Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, p. 55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

and numbers, into a personal biblical moral language of 'I and Thou'. The latter one, Carlyle believes, is a more natural and easily understood language, whereas Mill's theory is simply too abstract to carry any moral weight:

One other characteristic that strikes me much in your Description, and much in many other quarters is this strange universal hubbub the French are all making (and most of us make) about the "good of the species," and such like. How each man seems to mind all men's business,—and leave his own to mind itself! *Something* is to be done; but not for Me or for Thee; no, for Mankind,—when I and Thou are quite past helping. [...] [T]his manner of existence is to me almost as good as altogether foreign! Nay, I cannot find that it ever entered for much into the heart of any *real benefactor* of Mankind [...] The Good of the Species (a thing infinitely too deep for my comprehending) I leave, with the most perfect trust, to God Almighty the All-governing who does comprehend it; believing withal (when I do consider Causes and Effects—which is as rarely as possible) that no good thing I can perform, or make myself capable of performing, *can* be lost to my Brothers [...].¹⁰

This fundamentally Christian root of Carlyle's debate with Schiller and Mill must be re-evaluated if we are to fully appreciate his historical agenda. The biblical moral language of 'I and Thou' will account for the dialogical form of *The French Revolution* and the directly personal invitation of the reader to take part in the sublime-moral discussion, as well as to empathise with the events by placing oneself in the position of various figures on all sides of the conflict (in a form of Christian meditation). We can also read here the true Christian source of the stress Carlyle places on the humbleness of the historian's task: the full meaning of history is understood by the Creator only, of which man catches small glimpses here and there via a Romantic sympathetic view of the historical actors. Mill's utilitarian aspiration to determine the ultimate good of humanity is, in an orthodox Christian reading, at best a mistaken and unrealistic task, given man's scarce means to achieve such an altogether too mysterious and immense enterprise.

¹⁰ *CL 7: 52-57*. Compare Carlyle's *French Revolution*: 'With the working people, again it is not so well. Unlucky! For there are twenty to twenty-five millions of them. Whom, however, we lump together into a kind of dim compendious unity, monstrous but dim, far off, as the canaille; or, more humanely, as 'the masses.' Masses, indeed: and yet, singular to say, if, with an effort of imagination, thou follow them, over broad France, into their clay hovels, into their garrets and hutches, the masses consist all of units. Every unit of whom has his own heart and sorrows; stands covered there with his own skin, and if you prick him he will bleed. O purple Sovereignty, Holiness, Reverence; thou, for example, Cardinal Grand-Almoner, with thy plush covering of honour, who hast thy hands strengthened with dignities and moneys, and art set on thy world watch-tower solemnly, in sight of God, for such ends,—what a thought: that every unit of these masses is a miraculous Man, even as thyself art; struggling, with vision, or with blindness, for his infinite Kingdom (this life which he has got, once only, in the middle of Eternities); with a spark of the Divinity, what thou callest an immortal soul, in him!' *FR I: 33*.

Given this humble Christian stance that the historian is expected to assume, Peter Allan Dale's idealist Hegelian reading of Carlyle's history appears to be misguided:

[H]istory was for Carlyle ultimately an exercise in discovering Divinity. [...] [H]istory was the revelation of God's will on earth. Carlyle wanted to know more than this about history, however. He wanted to know the secondary causes behind historical change and the patterns according to which history moved; he wanted to know something of what may be called the *intrinsic* meaning of history, the meaning of history in and of itself apart from any external or religious interpretations.¹¹

In fact, Dale's reading is much closer to Mill's philosophy of history, which we will trace in the following chapters, than to Carlyle's radical critique of all attempts at discovering inner patterns of meaning in the mysterious texture of history (a challenge that is facilitated by Carlyle's Scottish literary Calvinist tradition and its well-rehearsed rejection of the doctrine of predestination). Where Dale sees the religious interpretation of history as 'external' and artificial, and Hegel's idealist interpretation as the more informed and closer to 'the *intrinsic* meaning of history,' Carlyle posits the reverse order – the religious (or spiritual) perception of the world as a mysterious and symbolic place is the most 'natural' one, lying at the foundations of human civilisation.¹²

This spiritual view is developed in two short essays published in 1830 and 1833, in which Carlyle continues the (Christian) dialogue with the Enlightenment and the Romantic traditions of historical perception.¹³ He begins by presenting the historical perspective as the most apposite and natural manner of thinking, pre-dating the scientific thought. Meditation on history offers the chance to arrive at a more holistic view of reality than the scientific vision:

History, as it lies at the root of all science, is also the first distinct product of man's spiritual nature, his earliest expression of what can be called Thought. It is a looking both before and after; as, indeed, the coming Time already awaits, unseen, yet definitely shaped, predetermined and

¹¹ Peter Allan Dale, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 50.

¹² Given Carlyle's profound criticism of his age, Dale's contention that: 'Like most of his contemporaries, Carlyle accepted the prevailing myth of progress' is even less convincing.' Dale, *The Victorian Critic*, p. 53. Compare also, for instance, Hill Shine's depiction of Carlyle as struggling to accommodate his Calvinism within the 'law of progress' via his Romantic readings in German literature: Hill Shine, *Carlyle's Fusion of Poetry, History, and Religion*.

¹³ 'On History' and 'On History Again', published first in *Fraser's Magazine* No. 10 (1830) and No. 41 (1833).

inevitable, in the Time come; and only by the combination of both is the meaning of either completed.¹⁴

Carlyle establishes here a direct connection between the historical and the spiritual way of contemplating reality. The traditional Calvinist view, which regards all time as a 'predetermined' manuscript, is transformed into a more holistic single look that focuses on the elements of past, present and future in a single act of contemplation, which unites diverse epochs and places. The book of history requires a far deeper meditative investment from the historian than a straightforward linear reading. This could perhaps best be described as the historian's 'prophetic' stance, which glimpses into incommensurable places and times in an attempt to rise to a higher spiritual vision.¹⁵

Next to this high prophetic vision of history, Carlyle draws attention again to the concrete, common-sense and very tangible character of historical perception. Meditation on the past is, in accordance with the Protestant biblical tradition, a writing available to and legible by everyone, a *res publica*:

In a certain sense all men are historians [...] Thus, as we do nothing but enact History, we say little but recite it: nay rather, in the widest sense, our whole spiritual life is built thereon. For, strictly considered, what is all Knowledge too but recorded Experience, and a product of History; of which, therefore, Reasoning and Belief, no less than Action and Passion, are essential materials.¹⁶

This artistic vision should be read in the context of Carlyle's agenda of writing a moral tale, which can be understood by everyone on the basis of their moral sense (conscience), and regardless of their political, theological or philosophical stance. History, according to Carlyle, must be guarded against all bluntly political interpretations, because it is a common moral sphere of encounter for all people. Referring to Zygmunt Bauman's (1925–) philosophical thought, of which Carlyle's concept is particularly reminiscent, we could say that Carlyle shares with the Polish thinker the idea that history is 'a cornerstone of freedom':

¹⁴ CME 2: 168.

¹⁵ This is artistically expressed in the Professor Teufelsdröckh's fantastic historical perspective in *Sartor Resartus*: 'Fortunatus had a wishing Hat, which when he put on, and wished himself Anywhere, behold he was There. By this means had Fortunatus triumphed over Space, he had annihilated Space; for him there was no Where, but all was Here. Were a Hatter to establish himself, in the Wahngasse of Weissnichtwo, and make felts of this sort for all mankind, what a world we should have of it!' SR: 191.

¹⁶ CME 2:168-9.

History can never be left solely to politicians, whether they are democratic or authoritarian. It is not a property of a political doctrine or of a regime it serves. History, if properly understood, is the symbolic design of our existence and the moral choices we make every day. Like human privacy, our right to study and critically question history is a cornerstone of freedom.¹⁷

This stress on the universal appeal of historiography is something that is posited repeatedly by Carlyle. History, in Carlyle's thought, is a common sphere of dialogue, which can be perceived in spiritual and moral sense both as concrete, private and individual, and simultaneously as transcending individuality and directing to a higher communion of all humanity. This catholic moral interest of history is capable of uniting the otherwise conflicting voices and ideologies. Carlyle writes:

History is a Free Emporium, where all these belligerents peaceably meet and furnish themselves; and Sentimentalist and Utilitarian, Sceptic and Theologian, with one voice advise us: Examine History, for it is 'Philosophy teaching by Experience.'¹⁸

The amiable, 'enlightened' meeting in the historical demesne does not happen at the price of obliterating historical detail, but rather, on the contrary, it is achieved through its deeper contemplation. We can hear in Carlyle's historical agenda echoes of the nineteenth-century project of historicism, which draws attention to the unique character of a historical event. History is, according to Carlyle, radically different in all ages and cannot be summarised into any single, however broad, theory:

Neither will it adequately avail us to assert that the general inward condition of Life is the same in all ages. [...] The inward condition of Life, it may rather be affirmed, the conscious or half-conscious aim of mankind, so far as men are not digesting-machines, is the same in no two ages.¹⁹

Significantly, however, Carlyle is deeply sceptical as to whether historical narrative ever manages to depict the concrete adequately and, even, whether it is capable of selecting those events which truly shaped the course of history. Informed by German Higher Criticism, Carlyle is well aware of the complex negotiation between the various personal and cultural myths that the historian weaves into his historiography

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, Leonidas Donskis, *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 30.

¹⁸ *CME* 2:169.

¹⁹ *CME* 2:170.

(which, in John Henry Newman's thought, is said to be 'far too subtle and spiritual to be scientific'):²⁰

It is, in no case, the real historical Transaction, but only some more or less plausible scheme and theory of the Transaction, or the harmonized result of many such schemes, each varying from the other and all varying from truth, that we can never hope to behold.²¹

Focusing on the French Revolution, Carlyle notes that the historical events that have frequently been depicted as 'the epochs in the world history' and the 'cardinal points on which grand world-revolutions have hinged', such as 'the French "Convocation of the Notables"', may not have been the true turning points in history at all: 'Suppose [...] that the real cardinal points lay far deeper; and had been passed over unnoticed, because no Seer, but only some mere Onlookers, chanced to be there!'²² In Carlyle's view, historiography is much more of a negotiated and even chaotic and often haphazard enterprise than it is admitted in the Whig model of history writing. Even supposing that the historian does manage to single out the important historical factors, Carlyle is sceptical about the ability of a historical narrative to translate the complexity and the depth of human experience into anything but a simplified and shallow narrative:

[I]t is an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself forth from innumerable elements. And this Chaos, boundless as the habitation and duration of man, unfathomable as the soul and destiny of man, is what the historian will depict, and scientifically gauge, we may say, by threading it with single lines of a few ells in length!²³

Given the complexity of reality, the historian must not only represent human experience in all its forms, but also, specifically, to concentrate on its spiritual foundations which are as mysterious as the depths of the human soul. Only on the deepest, spiritual level of contemplation, the chaos of human life offers some prospect of order, which is completely missed by science, that is altogether too shallow a tool to gauge the depths and the secrets of history. When Carlyle states the insufficiency of the one-dimensional

²⁰ Compare: John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (New York: The Catholic Publication Society, 1870), p. 352. 'Why then do they differ so much from each other, whether in their estimate of those testimonies or of those facts? Because that estimate is simply their own, coming of their own judgment; and that judgment coming of assumptions of their own, explicit or implicit; and those assumptions spontaneously issuing out of the state of thought respectively belonging to each of them; and all these successive processes of minute reasoning superintended and directed by an intellectual instrument far too subtle and spiritual to be scientific.'

²¹ *CME* 2:172.

²² *CME* 2:171.

²³ *CME* 2:172.

‘scientific’ narrative, another dimension of history emerges. The spiritual dimension must be accounted for symbolically in historical narrative. The symbolic is not easily fitted into a ‘one-dimensional’ narrative by the historian:

For as all Action is, by its nature, to be figured as extended in breath and in depth, as well as in length; that is to say, is based on Passion and Mystery, if we investigate its origin; and spreads abroad on all hands, modifying and modified; as well as advances towards completion,- so all Narrative is, by its nature, of only one dimension; only travels towards one, or towards successive points: Narrative is *linear*, Action is *solid*. Alas for our ‘chains,’ and ‘chainlets,’ of ‘causes and effect,’ which we so assiduously track through certain handbreadths of years and square miles, when the whole is a broad, deep Immensity, and each atom is ‘chained’ and complected [*sic*, completed] with all!²⁴

The historian’s *prophetic* glance directs history back to its deepest level, showing that all history is – ‘by its nature’ – in the most fundamental way embedded in (Christian) Mystery and Passion. Since, more often than not, history has not been viewed from such a prophetic stance, but, instead, it has been imprisoned within the scientific modes of thought, the historian must acknowledge and liberate (‘disimprison’) its true source for the reader. Philip Rosenberg’s contention that Carlyle’s agenda ‘frees history from its dependence on the nonhistorical, absolutist categories of thought’²⁵ is valid to an extent, since Carlyle ostensibly dismisses all rigid ‘absolutist’ readings, whether religious or secular. The Christian mystery develops (symbolically) in the depths of time and this process must be mirrored by the historian, when composing his account. However, this mirroring must not reveal too clearly its divine dimension or throw too much light on it (thereby depriving it of its essentially mysterious, sublime qualities). The historian must not collapse the (now liberated) spiritual into the sensual by simply ‘translating’ it into the physical dimension, or interpreting it philosophically. The spiritual sense must remain always veiled and non-determined, like Alfieri’s ‘black unfathomable lake placed far amid the melancholy mountains.’²⁶ The main task of the historical narrative now appears to be not only to allow for a sympathetic identification of the reader with the historical characters, but, more ambitiously, to awaken in the reader the attitudes of wonder, meditation, and reverence. Carlyle’s historical style must reflect the multi-layered, deeply symbolical character of life, ridden with questions and unknowns:

²⁴ *CME* 2: 172.

²⁵ Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 68.

²⁶ *Works* 25: 80.

Truly, if History is Philosophy teaching by Experience, the writer fitted to compose History is hitherto an unknown man. The Experience itself would require All-knowledge to record it, - were the All-wisdom needful for such Philosophy as would interpret it, to be had for asking. Better were it that mere earthly Historians should lower such pretensions, more suitable for Omniscience than for human science; and aiming only at some picture of the things acted, which picture itself will at best be a poor approximation, leave the inscrutable purport of them an acknowledged secret; or at most, in reverent Faith, far different from that teaching of Philosophy, pause over the mysterious vestiges of Him, whose path is in the great deep of Time, whom History indeed reveals, but only all History, and in Eternity, will clearly reveal.²⁷

Here we see stressed once more the idea of the humbleness of the writer when approaching history. This is understandable given that history has its sacred dimension which shines through the 'vestiges' of the secular one. Divine providence is mediated through mystery which will only be truly revealed at the end of the times, and all curious philosophical looks into the purpose and development of history are ultimately vain and misguided. What is more, they mark an illicit human crossing of the boundaries of knowledge, which must remain the domain of the divine, rather than human gaze.

We can also read here Carlyle positing the supernatural dimension of history as his answer to the nineteenth-century historical determinism. Carlyle rebels against the collapsing of the sacred into the scientific theory. A dedicated reader of the Book of Job, Carlyle has deeply assimilated the lesson that the supernatural is so utterly and sublimely *different* from human thought, that we can do little more than to contemplate it and acknowledge its existence, without the prospects of ever fully grasping its meaning. God's providential guidance is a mystery which must be acknowledged and meditated on imaginatively, but cannot be theorised in a scientific idiom.

In this light, for example, Eloise M. Behnken's contention that Carlyle's history collapses the spiritual layer of reality into the materialistic is unconvincing: 'Heaven and hell become metaphors of earthly experiences. The three-layered universe becomes one-layered.'²⁸ Such 'flattening' of history into a one-layered narrative is precisely what Carlyle's historical vision is trying to counter. Carlyle describes history as so 'intimately blended with Religion'²⁹ that it does not allow for any straightforward

²⁷ CME 2:172-3.

²⁸ Behnken, p. 131.

²⁹ CME 2:176.

separation of the one from the other. Carlyle's holistic position is revealed here again, which sees human experience as naturally religious, spiritual, rational, aesthetic and moral, categories which allow neither for any easy separation, nor assimilation of one within the other.

In the essay on Voltaire Carlyle specifically accuses Voltaire of the lack of historical sympathy with the Catholics and a deficiency of a larger historical stance. As a result, Voltaire's historical writings become merely an ideological tract against the Catholic church:

[Voltaire] reads History not with the eye of a devout seer, or even of a critic; but through a pair of mere anti-catholic spectacles. It is not a mighty drama, enacted on the theatre of Infinitude, with Suns for lamps, and Eternity as a background; whose author is God, and whose purport and thousandfold moral lead us up to the 'dark with excess of light' of the Throne of God; but a poor wearisome debating-club dispute, spun through ten centuries, between the Encyclopedic and the Sorbonne. Wisdom or folly, nobleness or baseness, are merely superstitious or unbelieving: God's Universe is a larger Patrimony of St. Peter, from which it were well and pleasant to hunt out the Pope.³⁰

Voltaire's lack of perspective in his historic vision, according to Carlyle, results from his rejection of the transcendent reference of all human history. It is narrow and biased, because he examines history through 'a pair of mere anti-catholic spectacles.' Carlyle's use of (Romantic) imagery connected with sight conveys again the search for a higher and more comprehensive critical platform for his writings (an idea poetically rendered in *The French Revolution* through Carlyle's symbol of the *Oeil-de-boeuf*, a divine eye overlooking the chaos of the Revolution, possibly punning on the imagery of a Medieval cathedral's rose window, traditionally decorated with scenes of the Last Judgment³¹). The French Revolution, Carlyle thinks, offers the appropriate stage for displaying such a 'divine drama', because, more than any other national subject, it is of common importance and interest to whole Europe, and, as such, its discussion offers a meeting space for all European nations. It focuses, as though in converging lenses, the main trends of European history and it is not devoid of a moral dimension, which Voltaire apparently had failed to grasp. Paraphrasing Goethe, Carlyle states that the

³⁰ *CME*: 2:121.

³¹ In Charles Dickens's *The Tale of Two Cities* (1854), the *Oeil-de-boeuf*, it is transformed into the British 'Bull's eye', symbolising the aristocracy as the target of the Revolutionaries. Carlyle's symbolic reading is thus collapsed into a purely social and political one.

recent French history demonstrates the profoundly Christian foundations of European culture, which cannot be ignored or simply dismissed in any historical reading:

the Christian Religion, once here, cannot again pass away; [...] in one or the other form, it will endure through all time; [...] as in Scripture, so also in the heart of man, is written, 'the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.' [...] 'It is a height to which the human species were fated and enabled to attain; and from which, having once attained it, they can never retrograde.'³²

Arguing with Voltaire, Carlyle states that only moral virtue can be the guarantor of human communion, out of which all other bonds (economic, aesthetic and political) grow, and which cannot be collapsed into any utilitarian or aesthetic theory:

It is contended by many that our mere love of personal Pleasure, or Happiness [...] will of itself lead him to respect the rights of others [...] Belief, beyond the testimony of the senses, and Virtue [...] are to be considered as supererogatory qualifications, as ornamental, not essential. Many there are, on the other hand, who [...] cannot discover, in such a universe of conflicting atoms, any principle by which the whole shall cohere.³³

The lesson of the French Revolution that history does not retrograde and that Christian culture, once inscribed into the body of history cannot be erased, reveals Carlyle's conservative vision of historical and cultural continuity. It is evidenced in the fact that, despite the French Republic's efforts to uproot the nation from its Christian origins, the Christian, 'celestial' nature of virtue emerges from the revolutionary struggles:

We are to remark also, that its operation was clogged by a very considerable disturbing force; by a large remnant, namely, of the old faith in Religion, in the invisible, celestial nature of Virtue, which our French Purifiers, by their utmost efforts of lavation, had not been able to wash away.³⁴

The Revolution is seen here as only *legible* within the Christian *theatrum mundi*. The relative perception of values, which Carlyle criticises in 'The Signs of the Times'

³² CME: 2:177. Cf. Carlyle's translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*: [W]e may say that the Christian Religion, having once appeared, cannot again vanish; having once assumed its divine shape, can be subject to no dissolution.' *Works*, 24:267.

³³ CME: 2:181.

³⁴ CME: 2:182.

(1829) ('The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one.'³⁵), does not allow for a rational reading of the Revolution.

Carlyle's criticism finds support in the thought of such twentieth-century moral thinkers as Hannah Arendt, who argued that the change in the perception of moral values, from universal and unchanging to relative and subservient to the needs of society, marks a major crisis in Western thought in the nineteenth century. Values become perceived as commodities which can be chosen and rejected depending on social requirements:

[V]alues are social commodities that have no significance of their own, but, like other commodities, exist only in the ever-changing relativity of social linkage and commerce [...] The 'good' loses its character as an idea, the standard by which the good and the bad can be measured and recognised; it has become a value which can be exchanged with other values, such as those of expediency or of power [...] [so that] ideas finally become mere values whose validity is determined not by one or many men but by society as a whole in its ever-changing functional needs.³⁶

This moral debate becomes the focus of Carlyle's first attempt at giving body to his theory of history, 'The Diamond Necklace' (1837). It was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in the spring of 1837 and concerns the events preceding the Revolution – a scandal in which the royal family became engaged through the machinations of the royal court, and in which the Queen's reputation was damaged irrevocably. The story involves Prince Louis de Rohan, a wealthy cardinal of the church and Jeanne de Saint-Rémi, who, preying on the cardinal's vanity, dupes him into believing that the Queen wants him to act as her agent in the purchase of a diamond necklace, for which service he is to be restored to the court and the Queen's favour.

In Carlyle's dramatic rendition, the story is transformed into a short moral tale in which the innocent characters, such as the Queen and the King become the unconscious victims of the dark scenario written by the devil and directed by his earthly prophet, the alchemist and charlatan, the mysterious and sinister Count Cagliostro, who does not make an appearance until the last scene. A host of courtly figures, including the main actors, are turned into the 'unconscious tool[s] of skilful knavery', in an orthodox

³⁵ *CME*: 2:73.

³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 32-33.

Christian belief that evil enslaves its victims and gradually deprives them of full freedom to act. However, while they mistakenly believe themselves to be the authors of the diabolical machinations, in fact they are all along being skilfully managed in the hands of the devil. The Christian background of the story is the battle between the forces of good and evil, with a traditional eschatological message of the ultimate destruction of the evil and the triumph of good.

‘The Diamond Necklace’, which Carlyle describes as a ‘romance’, is much indebted to Carlyle’s German studies in symbolism, and specifically to the pre-Reformation definition of the symbol, which he finds in Goethe’s *Märchen*. In Goethe’s writings Carlyle also finds the figure of a contemporary, civilised and ‘gentlemanly devil’, whom we could also perhaps describe as Schiller’s idea of a ‘civilised barbarian’. Carlyle was a great admirer of German *Märchen*, a collection of which he translated from German and published under the title of ‘The German Romance’ in 1827. The unquestionable master of the form for Carlyle is Goethe, whom he believes to give the old ‘Christian mythus’ a new body:

[I]n Goethe’s hands, the history of Faust, commencing among the realities of every-day existence, superadding to these certain spiritual agencies, and passing into a more aerial character as it proceeds, may fade away, at its termination, into a phantasmagoric region, where symbol and the things signified are no longer clearly distinguished; and thus the final result be curiously and significantly indicated, rather than directly exhibited.³⁷

In Goethe’s definition of symbol Carlyle discovers a union of the two realms of human experience: ‘symbol and the things signified are no longer clearly distinguished,’ no mere vestiges of the spiritual capable of being removed, they become united in a sacramental imagery.³⁸ The ‘phantasmagoric region’ to which Goethe’s symbols rise is no mere superadded meaning or simple allegory, but grows directly from the deepest dimension of reality. Writing about Goethe’s *Helena*, Carlyle notices:

Helena is not an Allegory, but a Phantasmagory; not a type of one thing, but a vague fluctuating fitful adumbration of many. [...] Properly

³⁷ *CME* 1:148.

³⁸ This reading of a symbol has essentially been denied to Carlyle. Compare for instance, Craig, Cairns, ‘Carlyle and Symbolism’ in *The Carlyles at Home and Abroad*, eds. David R. Sorensen and Rodger L. Tarr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.103-112.

speaking, *Helena* is what the Germans call a *Märchen* (Fabulous Tale), a species of fiction they have particularly excelled in.³⁹

For Carlyle, Goethe is above all things the unifier, and thus, the master of the symbolic form in the traditional Christian meaning (which is derived from Greek *'symbolon'* and denotes 'the one that brings things together'). Goethe unites the seen and the unseen world, natural and supernatural, 'the Actual and the Ideal', knowledge and religion, ethics and aesthetics, reason and faith:

To our minds, in these soft, melodious imaginations of his, there is embodied the Wisdom which is proper to this time; the beautiful, the religious Wisdom, which may still, with something of its old impressiveness, speak to the whole soul; still, in these hard, unbelieving utilitarian days, reveal to us glimpses of the Unseen but not unreal World, that so the Actual and the Ideal may again meet together, and clear Knowledge be again wedded to Religion, in the life and business of men.⁴⁰

Carlyle eulogises *Märchen* as the most 'natural' and realistic form of writing, and truly, the 'Tale of all Tales' (148) (as, in Carlyle's Protestant understanding, is the Bible).

The German influence not only redefines and opens Carlyle's Calvinism to a pre-Reformation vision of the world, but it also fundamentally confirms the basic tenets of his creed. What Carlyle takes out of his study of Goethe is a portrait of the 'modern' gentlemanly and civil devil, who is apparently more interested in scientific experimentation than in his old job of tempting humanity. He speaks the Whig civilised language which mocks humanity's old religious superstitions, while also joining in in the Hobbesian depiction of human nature as utterly deprived and egoistic. He treats morality as, at best, a useless category in the modern highly-developed state of society. Carlyle admiringly calls Goethe's portrayal 'the best and only genuine Devil of these latter times':

Goethe's devil is a cultivated personage and acquainted with the modern sciences; sneers at witchcraft and the black art even while employing them, as heartily as any member of the French Institute; for he is a *philosophe*, and doubts most things, nay, half disbelieves even his own existence. [...] he is the Devil, not of Superstition, but of Knowledge. Here is no cloven foot, or horns or tail: he himself informs us that, during the late march of intellect, the very Devil has participated in the spirit of the age, and laid these appendages aside. [...] He can believe in nothing,

³⁹ *CME* 1:148.

⁴⁰ *CME* 1:158.

but in his own self-conceit, and in the indestructible baseness, folly and hypocrisy of men. For him, virtue is some bubble of the blood: 'it stands written on his face that he never loved a living soul.' Nay, he cannot even hate: at Faust himself he has no grudge; he merely tempts him by way of experiment, and to pass the time scientifically.⁴¹

Crucially for our study, in Goethe and the German Romantic writings, Carlyle discovers that the Christian moral portrayal of the agency of evil in this world is still a valid and artistically-potent one.

'The Diamond Necklace' can be read as a type of Medieval morality play and German *Märchen*, which transcends the narrated facts and symbolically unites the earthly and the spiritual realms. Carlyle writes in a letter to his brother:

My attempt was to make Reality Ideal: there is considerable significance in that notion of mine; and I have not yet seen the limits of it; nor shall till I have tried to go as far as it will carry me. The story of the Diamond Necklace is all told in that Paper with the strictest fidelity; yet in a kind of musical way: it seems to me there is no Epic possible that does not first of all ground itself on Belief [...].⁴²

He describes it as 'no foolish brainweb, but actually 'spirit-woven' in the Loom of Time.'⁴³ The events of 'The Diamond Necklace' have a symbolic meaning and are intended to provide a moral guidance to the audience. Carlyle's main purpose is to reinscribe man's life into the orthodox Christian framework, through the exemplum of the pre-revolutionary events:

Awake poor troubled sleeper: shake off thy torpid nightmare-dream; look, see, behold it, the Flame-image; splendours high as Heaven, terrors deep as Hell: this is God's Creation; this is Man's Life!⁴⁴

⁴¹ *CME* 1:173-4.

⁴² *CL* 7:58-65.

⁴³ Thomas Carlyle, 'The Diamond Necklace' in *Thomas Carlyle: Historical Essays*, ed. by Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). 'The Diamond Necklace' challenges the sharp separation which has been made between fiction and history in Carlyle's thought. Patrick Brantlinger, for example, claims that Carlyle's rejection of fiction has to do with his definition of 'fact' and 'reality' as opposed to romance and fiction supposedly defined as 'lying' in Carlyle's thought. Cf. Patrick Brantlinger, "'Romance,'" "Biography," and the Making of *Sartor Resartus*', *Philological Quarterly*, 52:1 (1973), 108-118. Compare also: George Levine, *The Boundaries of Fiction: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), where Levine argues that Carlyle's religion made him naturally apprehensive of the use of fiction, a trait which he never managed to overcome.

⁴⁴ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 89.

Writing about Carlyle's historical sensibility, Malcolm Hardman contends that it is characteristically medieval in foregrounding a deep sense of mystery and the role of the author as the interpreter of the connection between heaven and earth:

The view of history Carlyle provides in his commentary is comparable to the medieval one, which envisages a series of epochs held together by a divine purpose which it is the function of the chronicler to explain. For Carlyle, as for Dante, 'history' is a mysterious book that can be fully read only by the light of eternity.⁴⁵

By way of restoring this Medieval perception of a greater providential plan that suffuses all history, Carlyle begins *The Diamond Necklace* by contesting Burke's famous pronouncement that with the arrival of the French Revolution 'the age of chivalry is gone':

The Age of Romance has not ceased; it never ceases; it does not, if we will think of it, so much as very sensibly decline. 'The passions are repressed by social forms; great passions no longer show themselves?' Why, there are passions still great enough to replenish Bedlam [...].⁴⁶

Carlyle reverses Burke's statement in order to re-inscribe the Revolutionary events back into the traditional Christian worldview, which he sees, similarly to Burke, as mediated via culture. However, Carlyle's Christian worldview is not limited by culture, and quite frequently actively and profoundly challenges it. For all the shock and apocalyptic attitudes that the French Revolution provoked in Europe, 'The Diamond Necklace' presents the events of 1789 not in terms of a *disruption* of Christian culture, but, rather, as a *continuation* of the drama between good and evil. Burke, in Carlyle's critique, is implicitly repeating the faulty vision of some of the French Revolutionary ideologists, who saw it as a radical break with French culture and history.

Carlyle had long been considering allegory as one of the most suitable genres for his story. In an essay on Goethe, he praises allegory as the most accurate mode of writing about morality, referring to *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), while he simultaneously condemns John Bunyan's unattractive theology:

We profess ourselves unfriendly to no mode of communicating Truth; which we rejoice to meet with in all shapes, from that of the child's Catechism to the deepest poetical Allegory. Nay, the Allegory itself may

⁴⁵ Malcolm Hardman, 'Thomas Carlyle: Founding a New Literature of Thought' in *Six Victorian Thinkers*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 15-42.

⁴⁶ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 85.

sometimes be the truest part of the matter. John Bunyan, we hope, is nowise our best theologian; neither, unhappily, is theology our most attractive science; yet which of our compends and treatises, nay, which of our romances and poems, lives in such mild sunshine as the good old *Pilgrim's Progress* in the memory of so many men?⁴⁷

Bunyan's harsh theology fails to bring about the transformation which Carlyle, quoting Schiller, requires of all literature, which is to present humanity in their full dignity: 'Man has lost his dignity, but art has saved it, and preserved it for him in expressive marbles. Truth still lives in fiction, and from the copy the original will be restored.'⁴⁸ However, his chosen allegorical tongue of moral and spiritual argument is approved by Carlyle, with the addition that it must be transformed into a 'poetical Allegory' that would account for Carlyle's aesthetic studies.

Ever since the eighteenth-century critical re-examination of the Bible, the existence of miracles had been questioned in theology⁴⁹ but in 'The Diamond Necklace' Carlyle provokingly accepts the miraculous, supernatural intervention in this world, by claiming poetically that he himself has 'overhead the infinite Deep, with greater and lesser lights, bright-rolling, silent-beaming, hurled forth by the Hand of God.'⁵⁰ The distance afforded by the sublime perception allows for the transcendent to reveal itself, which might otherwise remain unnoticed: 'no age ever seemed the Age of Romance to itself.' Carlyle answers Burke's overly apocalyptic vision with a gently mocking Scottish rhetoric:

Where is the Romance? In the Scotch way one answers. Where is it not? That very spectacle of an Immortal Nature, with faculties and destiny extending through Eternity, hampered and bandaged up, by nurses, pedagogues, posture-masters, [...] that, in these days, meets you in all thorough-fares: a 'god-created Man,' all but abnegating the character of Man [...].⁵¹

Although hampered and often a prisoner of its own social and philosophical theories which obfuscate its true origins, humanity retains its dignity and position in the same divine moral drama in which it has always been taking part. In Carlyle's perception, history writing has become overly narrow, through its excessive focus on the political

⁴⁷ *CME* 1:113.

⁴⁸ *CME* 1:44.

⁴⁹ Hume, "Of Miracles", *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. IV: *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

⁵⁰ *CME* 1:88.

⁵¹ *CME* 1:85.

issues, instead of asking deeper moral questions: 'What did the Whigs say of it? What did the Tories? The Priests? The Freethinkers? [...] Can it be wonderful that Histories, wherein open lying is not permitted, are unromantic?'⁵² The historian's task, then, is to return to humanity its true position in the universe.

In this context, the project of 'The Diamond Necklace', is, first of all, to depict life again in 'the ancient dialect', as the contest between the forces of good and evil. Carlyle begins with the scene of the making of the necklace. The scene demonstrates how a relatively small moral weakness of the maker of the necklace (which is his excessive and vain love of precious objects) provides the point of entrance for evil into the fable, and produces a chain reaction (since, once admitted, evil naturally spreads), involving and corrupting an increasing number of characters. Thus the 'actors' in the tale who believe themselves to be acting freely and to be in control of the dramatic events, succumb to the devilish machinations, and ultimately disappear one after another in the turmoil of history, so that by the time of the final 'miraculous' appearance of the demonic Count Cagliostro, no one is left on the stage. In the final epilogue Cagliostro reveals himself as the one who has been pulling the strings behind the stage all along (yet, unknowingly, he has been tricked too, himself only a prophet of the devil, apparently the only one in full control of the historical chaos).

In this sense, 'The Diamond Necklace' stages the responsibility of humans for one another. Cardinal Rohan's sin is not isolated, but intricately entangled in the system of belief dominant in the French court where he thrives:

In fact, if the tolerating mind will meditate it with any sympathy, what could poor Rohan perform? Performing needs light, needs strength, and a firm clear footing; all of which had been denied him. Nourished, from birth, with the choicest physical spoon-meat, indeed; yet also, with no better spiritual Doctrine and Evangel of Life than a French Court of Louis the Well-beloved could yield [...] he awakes, at man's stature, with man's wild desires, in a World of the merest incoherent Lies and Delirium; himself a nameless Mass of delirious Incoherences.⁵³

Carlyle introduces into his tale a larger cosmopolitan vision, by making Rohan's chief sin his lack of sympathy for the fate of partitioned Poland. The French lack of sympathy for Poland, a country connected with France not only through political and dynastic ties,

⁵² *CME* 1:87.

⁵³ *CME* 1:98.

but also via a larger brotherly union of all (European) nations,⁵⁴ becomes yet another point of corruption, which allows for the devilish operations of the charlatan Cagliostro.⁵⁵ Through rejecting its relationship with another European country, France is justly visited by the pestilence of Cagliostro's dark powers (in an act of poetic justice in *The French Revolution* Carlyle will compare the bleeding France to the partitioned Poland).⁵⁶

Within the larger Enlightenment-rooted debate on the moral sense and free will, which we have been charting in this chapter, it is crucial to read the apparently *deterministic* environment in which the characters of 'The Diamond Necklace' operate as a moral *exemplum* dealing with the operation of evil in the world which, in an orthodox Christian interpretation, once admitted, slowly deprives its victims of freedom. The extreme example of this state (in accordance with Carlyle's earlier depictions of demonic actions) can be seen as a demonic possession. Under the powers of Cagliostro, France falls into 'an enchanted dream', in which conscience and free will no longer exercise their powers:

The Psychologists, however, commit one sore mistake; that of searching, in every character named human, for something like a conscience. Being mere contemplative recluses, for most part, and feeling that Morality is the heart of Life, they judge that with all the world it is so. Nevertheless, as practical men are aware, Life can go on in excellent vigor, without crotchet of that kind.⁵⁷

Conscience, while a common power of all humanity in Carlyle's enlightened reading, can be forsaken not only on a personal level, but also by larger human communities. In an image reminiscent of Carlyle's 'mechanical' action, as described in 'The Signs of the Times', life without an active exercise of conscience becomes an act of theatrical masquerade, to all appearances fully directed by the devil (and, in Burke's aesthetics,

⁵⁴ 'Rohan, indeed, sees Poland a-partitioning; or rather Georgel, with his 'masked Austrian' traitor, 'on the ramparts,' sees it for him: but what can he do? [...] Abbé Georgel, as we fancy it was, writes a Despatch in his name 'every forthright;'—mentions, in one of these, that Maria Theresa stands, indeed, with the handkerchief in one hand, weeping for the woes of Poland; but with the sword in the other hand, ready to cut Poland in sections, and take her share.' 'Diamond Necklace', p. 107.

⁵⁵ Compare Carlyle's vision of the close connection between the European nations in 'State of German Literature': 'In fact, the past and present aspect of German literature illustrates the literature of England in more than one way. Its history keeps pace with that of ours, for so closely are all European communities connected, that the phases of mind in any one country, so far as these represent its general circumstances and intellectual position, are but modified repetitions of its phases in every other.' *CME* 1:51.

⁵⁶ 'The Kaiser and his Possessed Princes will too evidently come and take compensation—so much as they can get. Nay might one not partition France, as we have done Poland, and are doing; and so pacify it with a vengeance?' *FR* 2:230.

⁵⁷ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 109.

described as ‘tragicomic’). Rather than being a lesson on determinism, ‘The Diamond Necklace’ should be read as a defence of free will and of human conscience, which is a very fragile commodity, capable of being easily lost when not exercised regularly. Hence, the main purpose and indeed leading theme of ‘The Diamond Necklace’ and *The French Revolution* is to allow for this movement of conscience to develop in the reader. Rather than looking for definite answers, Carlyle believes that the deeper and more challenging (or quite frequently unsolvable) the ethical dilemmas his readers are left with, the better.

The apparently demonic and fatalistic vision in ‘The Diamond Necklace’ is corrected in the last act of the performance, when the Christian balance of powers is restored. Suitably, the ultimate revelation is given through the mouth of Cagliostro himself, the devil’s prophet. This is a fitting example of Carlyle’s humorous provocation: all attempts to purify history from its devilish content, are doomed to fail. By forcing the reader to listen to the devil’s long, sublime speech, Carlyle also suggests that we should listen to our own personal devils more frequently. Reading this within the context of the current geopolitical situation, Britain must listen attentively to French history and meditate upon it sympathetically, rather than simply demonising it. In the final scene, Count Cagliostro, now revealed as the devil’s prophet who had been directing the drama *in lieu* of its unconscious somnambulist actors, directs the last speech to his new-found followers, presenting his philosophy and assuring them that his chief aim is to wed truth to lie (the resemblance to Milton’s Satan is intended): ‘But the grand problem, Fellow Scoundrels, as you well know, is the marrying of Truth and Sham.’⁵⁸ It is in this light, where the mixture of truth and lie forces the reader to exercise their reason, imagination and conscience (all connected and profoundly intermingled powers in Carlyle’s vision), that we are to read Cagliostro’s own anti-Christian sermon, in which he begins by presenting a Manichean vision of the world:

Nevertheless, that old Christian whim, of an actual living and ruling God, and some sacred covenant binding all men in Him, with much other mystic stuff, does, under new or old shape, linger with a few. From these few keep yourselves forever far! They must even be left to their whim, which is not like to prove infectious. But neither are we, my Fellow Scoundrels, without our Religion, our Worship; which, like the oldest,

⁵⁸ ‘Diamond Necklace’, p. 144.

and all true Worships, is one of Fear. The Christians have their Cross, the Moslem their Crescent: but have not we too our — Gallows?⁵⁹

In the second part of his speech, Cagliostro experiences a prophetic vision, in which he pronounces his own downfall and the ultimate destruction of evil. In this way, he not only predicts the end of the Revolution before its beginning, but also proves, in a standard Christian eschatological reading, that he is not in full control of the events to come, and that good will finally triumph in spite of the operations of the devil.

Carlyle's provocative title of the last chapter, '*Missa est*', can be read as a mockery of the devilish mock holy mass presided over by Cagliostro, but also, in a deeper sense, it inscribes the whole narrative within the context of mystery of transubstantiation of the Catholic Mass. The mysterious transformation, which Carlyle's text aims to achieve is the (miraculous) change of the devil's punning mockery of man as 'a *mass* of foul loss and disappointment',⁶⁰ 'a nameless *Mass* of delirious Incoherences'⁶¹ [emphasis added] into a 'god-created Man'.⁶² Human tragedy, as depicted in 'The Diamond Necklace', consists in the forgetting of man's divine origin. This is why the transformation which Carlyle's narrative stages must aim to restore the place of conscience, freedom and dignity in human life. (This topic will be fully developed in *The French Revolution* where the pun will involve the play on the depictions of the revolutionary *masses*.)

The high-born (highest-born, for he came out of Heaven) lies drowning in the despicablest puddles; [...] and there remains of the glorious Possibility, which we fondly named Man, nothing but an inanimate mass of foul loss and disappointment, which we wrap in shrouds and bury underground, — surely with well-merited tears. To the Thinker here lies Tragedy enough; the epitome and marrow of all Tragedy whatsoever.⁶³

Cagliostro's sermon to his congregation resembles a Calvinist or Evangelical preaching,⁶⁴ which, in Goethe's words, calls upon the reader to change their view of the world into a holy land, in an act of imaginative 'transmutation'. This vocabulary is taken directly from Carlyle's Romantic depiction of Goethe:

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁰ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶⁴ See Barton Swaim and Suzy Anger on the influence of Calvinist sermon on Carlyle's writing.

Reader! within that head the whole world lies mirrored, in such clear ethereal harmony as it has done in none since Shakspeare [*sic*] left us: [...] all lies transfigured here, and revealed authentically to be still holy, still divine. What alchemy was that: to find a mad universe full of scepticism, discord, desperation; and *transmute* it into a wise universe of belief, and melody, and reverence! Was not there an *opus magnum*, if one ever was? This, then, is he who, heroically doing and enduring, has accomplished it.⁶⁵

The principal aim of Carlyle's story, seen as a moral *exemplum* inspired by Goethe, is to present the reader with a new spiritual tongue for their times. What we see in 'The Diamond Necklace', however, is Carlyle's typically medieval ('devilish') method of 'wedding' the true inspired sense of the word, which directs the reader to the spiritual dimension of the reality, with its flawed, uninspired opposite.⁶⁶

Whereas Carlyle's portrait of Goethe is unproblematic in the writer's ability to transmute his readers' uninspired perception of reality into its divine opposite, the earthly swindery of Count Cagliostro's alchemy in 'The Diamond Necklace' never allows for any such 'pure' and unproblematic reading. The last words in 'The Diamond Necklace', which are only apparently an orthodox ending of a Catholic mass ('*Ite, Missa est*') are fittingly delivered through the mouth of the most despicable character in the story who does not wish to transform or even alter his own creed in any way. In a tongue-in-cheek dispensation of the congregation, which mirrors the broad licentious medieval humour, the reader is left wondering whether the author has not been mocking him/her all along by having him/her take part in the devil's service and listen piously to his sermon on morals. 'The Diamond Necklace', *Sartor*, and *The French Revolution* reveal Carlyle's scepticism toward all ostentatiously pious and moral speech, and towards blind following of any moral creed which does not take into account human conscience. Things are frequently *not* what they seem, in Carlyle's reading, and the reader would be equally wrong both to follow Cagliostro's trite explanation of the world, and to fully reject it.

Finally, Cagliostro's speech re-inscribes the French Revolution into the long-discarded rhetoric of Richard Price's sermon, 'The Discourse on the Love of our Country' (1789). Price presents the early Whig construction of the Revolution (rejected in the wake of the Revolutionary terror) as the third 'glorious revolution', following the

⁶⁵ *CME* 2: 34-35.

⁶⁶ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 144.

English Revolution of 1688 and the American Revolution. The model for these three, in a traditional Whig reading, is the Protestant Reformation. In Price's tongue of progress, the Middle Ages mark the time of 'ignorance and barbarity of the dark ages' from which the Reformation is a deliverance, while the progressive revolutions act to serve as the ever greater and 'glorious' Christian progress to man's full moral and civil liberty from the religious and political oppression:

After sharing in the benefits of one Revolution, I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious. And now, methinks, I see the ardor for liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs, the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience.⁶⁷

According to Price's Lockean position people are not only entitled to rebel against a tyrannical sovereign, but even have a moral duty to do so:

it has oftener happened that men have been too passive than too unruly, and the rebellion of Kings against their people has been more common and done more mischief than the rebellion of people against their Kings.⁶⁸

Price's final speech:

Be encouraged, all ye friends of freedom and writers in its defence! The times are auspicious. Your labours have not been in vain. Behold kingdoms, admonished by you, starting from sleep, breaking their fetters, and claiming justice from their oppressors! Behold, the light you have struck out, after setting AMERICA free, reflected to FRANCE and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes and warms and illuminates EUROPE! Tremble all ye oppressors of the world! Take warning all ye supporters of slavish governments and slavish hierarchies! Call no more (absurdly and wickedly) reformation, innovation. You cannot now hold the world in darkness. Struggle no longer against increasing light and liberality. Restore to mankind their rights and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together.⁶⁹

can be seen mirrored in Cagliostro's prophecy of his own downfall, where Cagliostro's sublime rhetoric imitate Price's elevated speech:

⁶⁷ Richard Price, 'A discourse on the love of our country: delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the meeting-house in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain' (London: George Stafford, 1790), pp. 49-50.

⁶⁸ Price, p. 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

— Ha! What is this? Angels, Uriel, Anachiel, and ye other five; Pentagon of Rejuvenescence; Power that destroyed Original Sin; Earth, Heaven, and thou Outer Limbo which men name Hell! Does the EMPIRE OF IMPOSTURE waver? Burst there, in starry sheen, updarting. Light-rays from out *its* dark foundations; as it rocks and heaves, not in travail-throes, but in death-throes? Yea, Light-rays, piercing, clear, that salute the Heavens, — lo, they *kindle* it; their starry clearness becomes as red Hell-fire! IMPOSTURE is in flames, Imposture is burnt up: one Red-sea of Fire, wild-billowing enwraps the World; with its fire-tongue licks at the very stars. Thrones are hurled into it, and Dubois Mitres, and Prebendal Stalls that drop fatness [...].⁷⁰

Rather than a simple mockery of Price's speech, Cagliostro can be seen here rehearsing the early British reception of the Revolution, and also partly delivering Carlyle's true sentiments. While Carlyle does not share in Price's discourse of progress, he does accept his fundamental perception of the French Revolution as a sublime national moment in French and European history and the basic appraisal of the justness of the French revolutionary claims, as well as Price's vision of the Revolution as a second Reformation.⁷¹ Yet by having Price's moral-sublime message of the world's redemption from all earthly and heavenly evil delivered through Cagliostro's mouth, Carlyle, in the mock-sublime style of the *Anti-Jacobin*, simultaneously humorously questions Price's naïve narration of 'the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience'. Quite simply, things are never black and white in Carlyle's spiritual reading, and Price's interpretation is only one among the many warring constructions of the Revolution that Carlyle charts to the reader for their own personal perusal.

In 'The Diamond Necklace' Carlyle is setting his agenda for *The French Revolution* as a moral tale, which will radically reintroduce the supernatural, anti-utilitarian tongue into the discussion of recent French history, and reflect the dominating constructions of the Revolution in a way which is not to be accepted uncritically, but which should rather force the reader to employ actively, imaginatively and rationally ('non-mechanically') their moral sense and reflect upon their own imaginative and cultural constructs.

⁷⁰ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 148.

⁷¹ Cf. 'Precisely a century and a year after this of Puritanism had got itself hushed-up into decent composure, and its results made smooth, in 1688, there broke-out a far deeper explosion, much more difficult to hush-up, known to all mortals, and like to be long known, by the name of French Revolution. It is properly the third and final act of Protestantism'. *Works*, 5:237.

Chapter 5: 'Spiritual Hippopotamus': The French Revolution and Nineteenth-Century Britain

Examining the influence of Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744—1803) ideas on Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*, Ruth apRoberts defines Carlyle's reading of the figure of the prophet in a manner which is in stark contrast to the traditional image of 'someone who predicts the future'. Instead, she contends that it 'carries always the Old Testament meaning of someone 'possessed' - either by God or the truth.'¹ However, as I have been arguing so far, Carlyle's Enlightened sensibility, while sponsoring a deeply contemplative and holistic vision of history, is simultaneously profoundly sceptical of all self-acclaimed prophetic figures, and is far more interested in the examination of the figure of a false prophet, more often demonically-possessed than 'possessed by truth.' Carlyle is suspicious of all attempts at reading history according to any one absolutist model, which he sees from a Calvinist perspective as devilish attempts to usurp a privileged, divine perspective over the past. The example of a character who believes himself to be a prophet 'possessed by truth' in *The French Revolution* is the demonic Robespierre. Carlyle's own artistic historiography assigns to the historian the far humbler role of a minor mythographer, whose texts are personal, inconclusive, open to debate and 'woven' into the cultural texture of the past.²

In Carlyle's early writings, we find predominantly prophetic characters who can be described as tricksters or the devil's prophets. Whereas this has been partly recognised in *Sartor Resartus* in some postmodern deconstructions of Carlyle's playful

¹ Ruth apRoberts, 'Carlyle's Religion: The New Evangel', in *Literature and Belief*, pp. 103-122 (p.116).

² Compare Newman's definition of historian's task in the *Grammar of Assent*, where he discusses the personal aspect of history-writing which cannot be explained by any scientific theory: 'The aspect under which we view things is often intensely personal; nay, even awfully so, considering that, from the nature of the case, it does not bring home its idiosyncrasy either to ourselves or to others. Each of us looks at the world in his own way, and does not know that perhaps it is characteristically his own.' John Henry Newman, *A Grammar of Assent*, p. 361. According to Newman, historical authors 'have severally views of their own on the period of history which they have selected for investigation, and they are too learned and logical not to know and to use to the utmost the testimonies by which the facts which they investigate are to be ascertained. Why then do they differ so much from each other, whether in their estimate of those testimonies or of those facts? Because that estimate is simply their own, coming of their own judgment; and that judgment coming of assumptions of their own, explicit or implicit; and those assumptions spontaneously issuing out of the state of thought respectively belonging to each of them; and all these successive processes of minute reasoning superintended and directed by an intellectual instrument far too subtle and spiritual to be scientific.' *Ibid.*, p. 364.

narrative and the unreliable nature of the prophetic voice of the main hero,³ the continuity of this theme is not recognised in *The French Revolution*. In Carlyle's short stories, as well as in *Sartor*, the devil is a central, and well-defined figure around which the narrative revolves; yet, gradually, evil in Carlyle's fiction becomes more complex and less easily read. *The Heroes* apparently collapses all supernatural reference into a man-made myth, while *Frederick the Great* and Carlyle's later texts seem to reject the role of conscience, which is the focus of Carlyle's earlier texts, and instead endorse Hobbes's perspective on the role of power in establishing and guarding morality (with Carlyle's infamous motto that 'might is right'), and arguably testify to Carlyle's gradual loss of Christian hope. *The French Revolution* in this sense is a key work because it reflects critically on the era's progressive spiritual blindness. As we have seen, 'The Diamond Necklace' (1837) (which can be read as Carlyle's blueprint for *The French Revolution*), foregrounds the role of Count Cagliostro, the charlatan and symbolic devil of the story. *The French Revolution* checks Cagliostro's role as a character, but, similarly to 'The Diamond Necklace', saves for Cagliostro the last ironic 'prophetic' words of farewell. In a message delivered to the reader *ex-post facto*, the devil reveals himself as the chief 'writer' of the Revolutionary confusion of idioms.

Before we look more closely at Carlyle's 'prophetic' farewell to the reader, let us examine the figure of Cagliostro. In Carlyle's rendition, he is the epitome of the Babel-like state of linguistic chaos, which is his chosen demesne. A figure that became quasi-mythical in the nineteenth-century Europe, Count Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo), was an infamous charlatan who held a special fascination for Carlyle, as an emblem of the spiritual confusion preceding the French Revolution and the fall of the old feudal Europe. Carlyle depicts Cagliostro's environment in characteristically Gothic idiom:

Now the philosophic reflection we were to indulge in, was no other than this [...]: the portentous extent of Quackery, the multitudinous variety of Quacks that, along with our Beppo [Cagliostro], [...] overran all Europe

³ Cf. Roderick Watson, 'Carlyle: The World as Text and the Text as Voice', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 3, ed. by Douglas Gifford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp. 153-68; Colin N. Manlove, 'Perpetual Metamorphoses': The Refusal of Certainty in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*', in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. by D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 30-45. However, compare also: Stephen Bann, 'The Sense of the Past: Image, Text, and Object in the Formation of Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *The New Historicism*, ed. by H. Aram Veeseer (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 102-115 (pp. 102-5), where Bann proposes a reading of Carlyle's *Past and Present* informed by the theory of New Historicism, whereby he draws attention specifically to 'Carlyle's passionate evocation of subjective response to the past.' Bann, p. 104.

during [...] the latter half of last century. It was the very age of impostors, cut-purses, swindlers, double-goers, enthusiasts, ambiguous persons; [...] As if Bedlam had broken loose; as if rather [...] the everlasting Pit had opened itself, and from *its* still blacker bosom had issued Madness and all manner of shapeless Misbirths, to masquerade and chatter there.⁴

Here we see some of Carlyle's early uses of the Gothic for the depiction of history and historical figures. Carlyle publishes two separate essays on Count Cagliostro in the *Fraser's Magazine* in 1833, where he portrays Cagliostro as the symbolic figure that embodies the spirit of the times preceding the outbreak of the Revolution:

In that stertorous last fever-sleep of our European world, must not Phantasms enough, born of the Pit, as all such *are*, flit past, in ghastly masquerading and chattering? A low scarce-audible moan (in Parliamentary Petitions, Meal-mobs, Popish Riots, Treatises on Atheism) struggles from the moribund sleeper, frees him not from his hellish guests and saturnalia. [...] In that same French Revolution alone, which burnt up so much, what unmeasured masses of Quackism were set fire to.⁵

Carlyle's conservative social and religious strain can be appreciated here (even though Carlyle supported religious toleration in Britain and, as we shall see, embraced a nuanced and complex view of social change in the 1830s, something that Cagliostro's later speeches will yet reveal). Cagliostro is able to spread his false theories because of the spiritual 'fever-sleep' of Europe, during which various demonic and Gothic constructs emerge. Cagliostro's own alchemical pursuit of the philosopher's stone, a legendary substance able to convert base metals into gold, becomes in Carlyle's reading the symbol of his misleading and utopian philosophy. The philosopher's stone was also considered to be the elixir of life and symbol of spiritual enlightenment and perfection, reflecting Carlyle's satire on the Whig progressivist tongue. Cagliostro presents it to his followers as the magical way of annihilating the consequences of original sin and returning humanity to the Paradise:

In his system he promises his followers to conduct them to perfection, by means of a physical and moral regeneration; to enable them by the former (or physical) to find the prime matter, or Philosopher's Stone, and the *acacia* which consolidates in man the forces of the most vigorous youth,

⁴ *CME*: 3:259-260.

⁵ *CME*: 260-262. Compare also 'German playwrights' (1829), where Carlyle discusses German modern depictions of the devil and finds them all to be faulty because proceeding from 'the old story of Fate; an invisible Nemesis visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation'. *CME*: 274. Carlyle compares this phenomenal proliferation of demonic imagery in German literature to the British political discussion on 'Catholic Questions, and Parliamentary Reforms, and Select Vestries.' *CME*: 269.

and renders him immortal; and by the latter (or moral) to procure them a Pentagon, which shall restore man to his primitive state of innocence, lost by original sin.⁶

We see here Carlyle's critique of the French Revolution's attempts to exorcise sin from human nature and replace it with the language of social usefulness. We shall see this alchemical language developed by Carlyle later in this chapter in connection with the progressivist ideologies of the nineteenth-century.

According to Carlyle, the most characteristic trait of Cagliostro is his inability to speak any single human language. He speaks all the languages of Europe, yet at the same time speaks none of them coherently, which renders his tongue incomprehensible. Ironically drawing on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Carlyle presents Cagliostro as a caricature of Paul's model of love. Cagliostro does not 'speak in the tongues of men or of angels' (1 Corinthians 13:1), but, instead, babbles in an incoherent manner, mixing all European dialects with a pretence to religious fervour. Rather than Paul's 'Ode to Love,' Carlyle calls his speech 'a Tower-of-Babel jargon':

The man could not speak; only babble in long-winded diffusions, chaotic circumvolutions tending nowhither. He had no thought for speaking with; he had not even a language. His Sicilian Italian, and Laquais-de-place French, garnished with shreds from all European dialects, was wholly intelligible to no mortal; a Tower-of-Babel jargon, which made many think him a kind of Jew. But indeed, with the language of Greeks, or of Angels, what better were it? The man, once for all, has no articulate utterance; that tongue of his emits noises enough, but no speech.⁷

The description is particularly reminiscent of the portrayal of Carlyle's close friend, Edward Irving (1792-1834). Bossche has noted the similarity in Carlyle's depictions of Irving and Cagliostro,⁸ however, he has claimed that Carlyle's presentation of Irving as a false prophet is embedded in his idea that Irving is ultimately not a figure of authority, and that his teachings remain essentially private due to his small following. However, what I will argue is that a much more profound debate is taking place in Carlyle's

⁶ *CME*: 271.

⁷ *CME*: 276.

⁸ Bossche also compares Irving to Gorge Fox, the founder of the Quakers: 'Fox's attempt to regain prelapsarian innocence represents Carlyle's desire to recover a transcendental language. But, although rebellion liberates Fox from his 'Prison' into 'lands of true Liberty,' the language he speaks does not become a shared belief, a constitutive mythus; it remains private.' Similarly, the problem with Irving was that he thought he had a large following, 'But, in fact, the language was shared only by a small minority of Irving's followers, the majority deserting the congregation.' Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p. 48.

artistic presentation of Irving in the figure of Cagliostro. Irving was a Scottish clergyman known for his ‘flamboyant phrasing and brilliant style’⁹ of preaching which attracted to his teachings among others Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Given Irving’s popularity in London, Carlyle’s artistic critique, which follows his own period of youthful fascination with Irving’s early teachings (prior to Irving’s parting with the Church of Scotland), is truly original. Proclaimed by De Quincey ‘the greatest orator of the age’,¹⁰ Irving, after emigrating to London, established in 1832 ‘The Holy Catholic Apostolic Church’ and was subsequently officially removed from the ministry in The Church of Scotland.¹¹ Irving was particularly fascinated by the prophetic and charismatic Millenarian teachings and apocalyptic visions in The Book of Revelation. Irving’s own definition of the role of a prophet appears to match apRoberts’s description of the prophet as the one ‘possessed by God’. David Malcolm Bennett notes that, for Irving prophesying is ‘not what is commonly understood by prophesying [...] the mere foretelling of future events, because it is unto men “for edification and exhortation and comfort.”’ The prophet is, in Irving’s account, ‘God’s mouth to men’.¹² The power of the appointed prophets in Irving’s church can be appreciated in the examples of their intervention that Bennett quotes. Bennett notes an occasion in which the prophet’s word in Irving’s congregation stopped Irving from performing the ceremony of baptism of an infant, due to Irving’s lack of re-ordination in his new church; while on another occasion another prophet stopped a baptism due to the presence of an ‘unholy thing’ in the church.¹³

The prophets were also known as ‘angels’ in Irving’s congregation, a fact that Carlyle learnt incidentally through a confusion that had been made between himself and his namesake, Thomas Carlyle of Irving’s Catholic Apostolic Church. In his sharp humour, Carlyle notices that his namesake, an advocate, is under the spiritual leadership

⁹ *Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, p. 242.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ On the influence of Irving’s discourse upon Carlyle and Carlyle’s support of Catholic emancipation against Irving, see also John Ulrich, ‘Thomas Carlyle, Edward Irving, and Millennialist Discourse’, in *Literature and Belief* 25:1-2 (2005), 55-87. Ulrich traces the affinities between Carlyle’s and Irving’s political views especially in connection with the diminishing role of the church and religion in the society. Compare also Caroline McCracken-Flesher’s study, where she juxtaposes Carlyle’s and Irving’s prophetic styles, while claiming that the main difference between the two is Carlyle’s secular and Irving’s religious stance: ‘What did they prophesy? Irving exhorted a return to Christianity; Carlyle tested mankind in the fiery furnace of “Work.”’ Caroline McCracken-Flesher, ‘Carlyle, Irving, and the Problematics of Prophecy’, *Literature and Belief*, 25:1-2 (2005), 25-52, p. 31.

¹² David Malcolm Bennett, *Edward Irving Reconsidered: The Man, His Controversies, and the Pentacostal Movement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), p. 195.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

of a 'rich Banker', Drummond, who, in Irvingite's ecclesiastical hierarchy, must therefore be an Archangel. In a letter of reply to K. J. Bunsen, Carlyle explains the confusion:¹⁴

There is or lately was a Thomas Carlyle, once an Advocate in Edinburgh, but who quitted that profession for some form of religious Fanaticism ("Irvingism" is the name of it); who preaches accordingly, as an "Angel" so-called, at Albury in Surrey, under the wing of Henry Drummond the rich Banker, a Patron of that sect, and perhaps an "Archangel" in it.¹⁵

Carlyle continues his letter in the same ironic vein, while he explains that he had been accused by his namesake of being 'possessed with a Devil', and wishes to have no association with his person:

T. Carlyle the Angel [...] is, I believe, a zealous, very well-intentioned man; but narrow, headlong, dim, and probably not without a dash of the [word illegible]—he is an "Angel" at Albury, in short; and I am no Angel anywhere! There is in fact nothing common to us but the Name, and general descent from Adam. Me, I have heard, he considers to be a man of some ability, but "possessed with a Devil": I shall very specially request of you to assure all persons high and low who may inquire of you, that we have "no concern with the other house".¹⁶

In this letter the spiritual pretensions of the Irvingite sect are reduced to the merely economic level, and ridiculed as pious fictions of rather incredibly grotesque scale (since Irving's little congregation apparently embodies the Christian angelic hierarchy). We see here Carlyle's sharp sense of the grotesque in human behaviour, which will be appreciated also in his presentation of Robespierre's secular religious cult of equally cosmic scale and pretensions. Robespierre's cult of reason is ultimately no less ridiculous than Irving's religious sect.

In a letter to his mother, Carlyle depicts his meeting with Irving, who tries to persuade him to join his sect and speak the 'tongues'. Carlyle ridicules Irving's 'prophetic' tongue as well as that of Thomas Carlyle the Angel, by describing them as 'insanest Babble [...] that ever was emitted even from Bedlam itself.' By specifically quoting Irving, he also mocks the idea that the text produced by Thomas Carlyle the Angel and published in Irving's 'Prophetic Magazine [...] "was given him"—by the spirit!'. A larger idea in Carlyle's thought influenced by the German Higher Criticism

¹⁴ Cf. CL 16:237-238.

¹⁵ CL 16:237-238.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

can be appreciated here, that no human narrative is fully inspired. Irving's idea of a prophet is a delusion:

Meeting Irving the other day on the street, he appointed me to come and take tea with him. [...] Irving had read the "Characteristics," with quite high estimation of the talent &c &c: nevertheless he seemed to think I was going a very wrong road to work, and should consider myself, and take into the "Tongues." He was nobly tolerant in heart; but in head quite bewildered, almost imbecile. He put into my hands, as "the deepest view he had ever seen" a Paper (in his Prophetic Magazine "the Morning Watch") written by a namesake of mine in Edinburgh, or rather not by him, "for it was given him"—by the spirit! This deepest view I glanced into, and found to be simply the insanest Babble, without top bottom or centre, that ever was emitted even from Bedlam itself.— Poor Irving! [...] he has once for all surrounded himself with Delirium, and with the Delirious; and so stands quite exiled from all general usefulness. Nevertheless [if] he be spared alive, he is nowise done yet; but has other outbreakings in store.¹⁷

In his letters and *Reminiscences* Carlyle frequently refers to Irving's 'inane babble about [...] tongues.'¹⁸ Jane Carlyle describes with horror and incredulity their attendance at one of Irving's meetings in which the speaking with tongues was performed:

A far worse Bedlam is poor Edward Irving's house where people are to be found at all hours '*speaking with tongues*' that is to say shrieking and howling in no tongue. I happened to be there one night just when a Lady was under the inspiration of 'the Spirit'; and the horrible sounds she made almost threw me who am not of a hysterical temperament into a fit. I could not help crying all the way home. Indeed it is truly distressing to see a man of such talents and such really good and pious dispositions as Mr Irving given up to an infatuation so absurd—ready to sacrifice to it his dearest friends, his reputation, all his worldly prospects. Most people think it all a humbug—which is quite reasonable in those who do not *know* him. But a man more sincere in his professions does not exist.¹⁹

In Jane's emotionally-charged description (Irving was once the love of her life, who then married another woman), Irving's 'speaking in tongues' connotes a demonic state of possession in which the 'possessed' are transformed into animalistic figures who make incomprehensible sounds. Jane's shock is only apparently mitigated by her concern with Irving's deteriorating health and reputation.

¹⁷ CL 06:128-133.

¹⁸ CL 6:110-113.

¹⁹ CL 6:34-36.

There is no doubt that Irving's style in his Millenarian prophecies about the imminent end of the world and the second coming of Christ presented in *The last days: a discourse on the evil character of these our times* (1828) is parodied in Cagliostro's speech where he talks about the fire-consummation of the world. Irving writes:

And now, finally, and above all, as the consummation of the whole, it pleased God to make known to us the coming of Christ in glory and in majesty, and his reign upon the earth for a thousand years, together with the resurrection of the saints, and the other mysteries of grace therewith connected.²⁰

Both Irving and the historical Count Cagliostro share a distinctly Old-Testament prophetic style. Cagliostro's 'Lettre-Au-Peuple-Francais' famously 'predicted' the fall of the Bastille and the formation of a new government of the States General.²¹ Irving in his sermons and speeches prophesies that democracy is the cardinal sin of modern times and foretells its imminent fall. In the *Reminiscences* Carlyle writes:

[Irving] was by this time deep in Prophecy and other aberrations; surrounded by weak people, mostly echoes of himself and his incredible notions: but he was willing to hear me, too, on secularities [...] even shrewd in regard to anything of business if you consulted him on that side. He objected clearly to my Reform-Bill notions; found Democracy a thing forbidden, leading down to outer darkness; I, a thing inevitable, and obliged to lead whithersoever it could.²²

Carlyle's dramatic depiction of 'fire-breathing Spectre of DEMOCRACY; incalculable, which is enveloping the world!'²³ in *The French Revolution* can be read as a parody of Irving's apocalyptic style.

There is also a close connection between Cagliostro's (pseudo-scientific) alchemical search for the philosopher's stone and his attempts at the purification of the world from all evil on the one hand, and Irving's fanatical religion on the other. In a letter to Jane, Carlyle depicts Irving's personal exorcisms performed on the members of the congregation. Carlyle sarcastically comments that after Irving had cast out the devil from a possessed member of his congregation, the devil unfortunately returned the following week:

²⁰ Edward Irving, *The last days: A Discourse on the Evil Character of These Our Times* (London: Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), p. xxii.

²¹ Cf. Count Cagliostro's 'Lettre-Au-Peuple-Francais' in *CME*: 288-289.

²² *Reminiscences*, p. 296.

²³ *FR* 1:22.

Friday I spent with Irving, in the animal-parlanti [talking-animals] region of the Supernatural. Understand, ladykin, that the 'gift of tongues' is here also (chiefly among the women), and a positive belief that God is still working miracles in the Church—by hysterics. Nay, guess my astonishment when I learned that poor Dow of Irongray is a Wonder-worker and Speaker with tongues; and had actually 'cast out a Devil' (which however returned again in a week) [...] was the Devil ever busier than now; when the Supernatural must either depart from the world, or reappear there like a chapter of Hamilton's 'diseases of Females.'²⁴

Carlyle's joke is not only at Irving's expense, but also at the expense of all philosophy which seeks to remove evil permanently from this world. Despite his jovial humour, Carlyle's depiction of Irving's church is clearly demonic. Similarly to Cagliostro, Irving is meddling with the supernatural in ways that are both naïve and highly dangerous both to himself and his congregation. Rather than casting demons out, as he explicitly does, Irving appears to be unconsciously awakening them in his unaware followers.²⁵ In Carlyle's poetical rendition of this theme, the revolutionary agenda of removing the Christian past (the evil per se in Robespierre's 'cult of reason' tongue) from France's cultural narrative awakens the national demons, which, once released, will be difficult to subdue.

By giving Cagliostro the prophet the last words in *The French Revolution*, Carlyle foregrounds the fact that his narrative is not to be taken at face value. The confusing structure of *The French Revolution* and its linguistic complexity serve as a comment on the contemporary British confusion of tongues in the discussion of the Revolution, of which Cagliostro (the devil) appears to be the main scriptwriter. Following Cagliostro's devil-like 'dividing' nature (Gr. *symbolon*, 'to unite, to put together,' *diabolon* 'to divide, take apart') the whole narrative becomes divided against itself through the use of warring, foreign and stylistically mismatched styles and contradictory narratives. Nothing is to be taken literally, even time and place do not follow their usual course. *The French Revolution* becomes a textual terrain of a world order falling apart. Cagliostro's prophecy from *The Diamond Necklace*, a text written

²⁴ CL 5:348-359.

²⁵ John Ulrich has argued that, unlike Irving's pre-millenarianism, Carlyle assumes a 'secularised' version of the post-millenarian language, which, instead of the second coming of Christ, envisions a gradual improvement of secular institutions which strive to embody the Divine with ever greater perfection. Yet, in view of Carlyle's critique of Cagliostro's philosopher's stone and of his position on Irving's fanaticism, what we see is not only Carlyle's strong rejection of all progressivist ideologies but also his opposition to all forms of millenarianism. Cf. Ulrich, *op. cit.*

before *The French Revolution*, becomes an unreliable ending of the text, which is at odds with its multivocality:

On the whole, therefore, has it not been fulfilled what was prophesied, *ex-post facto* indeed, by the Archquack Cagliostro, or another? He, as he looked in rapt vision and amazement into these things, thus spake: 'Ha! What is this? Angels, Uriel, Anachiel, and the other Five; Pentagon of Rejuvenescence; Power that destroyed Original Sin; Earth, Heaven, and thou Outer Limbo, which men name Hell! Does the EMPIRE OF IMPOSTURE waver? Burst there, in starry sheen updarting, Light-rays from out *its* dark foundations; as it rocks and heaves, not in travail-throes, but in death-throes? Yea, Light-rays, piercing, clear, that salute the Heavens,—lo, they kindle it; their starry clearness becomes as red Hellfire!²⁶

Although Carlyle's text stages a crisis in the spiritual reading of the Revolution, he is far from embracing Cagliostro's apocalyptic scenario. The undependable character of Cagliostro's message, a parody on Irving's tongue, is foregrounded by its removal from the frame of the narrative. A comment given at the end of the narrative, it comes '*ex-post-facto*', temporarily and textually 'after' and 'from the outside' of the narrative, staging the misfit of the British narratives of the Revolution. Cagliostro is, properly speaking, a character from a separate story, which is foregrounded by the fact that the whole passage is a direct quote from another text ('The Diamond Necklace') and presented to the reader as a quotation, rather than the author's voice. Far from a straightforward conclusion to Carlyle's complex narrative, Cagliostro's voice is another textual construct (a demonic echo, Carlyle self-quote) which the reader needs to deconstruct, and which also possibly reflects the self-centredness of the British conservative narrative of the Revolution in the wake of Burke. A parody of the construction of the French Revolution as Satan's work in conservative British periodical press²⁷ (with the leading role of *The Anti-Jacobin Review*), the quote challenges the British smug creed in their moral superiority over France.

Multivocality, echo, and rumour are Carlyle's chosen themes in *The French Revolution*, which textually and rhetorically performs the idea of miscommunication, something that Carlyle to an extent sees as irremovable from our earthly life. Paradoxically, it is all puritanical attempts at controlling and 'clearing' the historical

²⁶ 'Diamond Necklace', p. 148.

²⁷ Compare the discussion of *Sartor* in Ian Duncan's 'A New Spirit of the Age', in *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 285-311.

narrative off its ‘messy’ and myth-mediated texture that prove to have the opposite effect and release the demonic. Although we may assume that God’s providence *does* speak through the Revolutionary tumult,

From of old, as it is written, are His goings forth; in the great Deep of things; fearful and wonderful now as in the beginning: in the whirlwind also He speaks! and the wrath of men is made to praise Him.—But to gauge and measure this immeasurable Thing, and what is called account for it, and reduce it to a dead logic-formula, attempt not!²⁸

yet the thick texture of voices past and present do not allow us to read His signs (or indeed ever fully read them). The multiple constructions of the revolutionary narrative by the self-avowed historical prophets on all political and national credentials are not to be fully trusted, according to Carlyle. There simply is no privileged access to history which remains, essentially, on its deepest level a mystery. There is an unaccountable residue in human life which does not allow for any de-mythologised and non-symbolic interpretation. Carlyle brandishes this complex narrative-structure of history, celebrating it in the ironic accolade as the ‘*written epitomised synopsis of Rumour*’ (a name that both warns the reader against careless interpretations, and rejoices in history’s multi-layered and palimpsest-like texture):

It is thus everywhere that foolish Rumour babbles not of what was done, but of what was misdone or undone; and foolish History (*ever, more or less, the written epitomised synopsis of Rumour*) knows so little that were not as well unknown.²⁹

Describing Marat’s fiery speeches through the ‘Throats of Journals’, Carlyle introduces a story which is explicitly given as an explanation of French credulity and reliance on hearsays, while Carlyle simultaneously makes a smug comment about the unreliable character of the British periodical press and humanity’s tendency to follow rumour more eagerly than to search for truth (‘rumour,’ ‘hearsay’ and ‘gossip’ are some of the most frequently repeated words in *The French Revolution*):

But, on the whole, are not Nations astonishingly true to their National character; which indeed runs in the blood? Nineteen hundred years ago, Julius Caesar, with his quick sure eye, took note how the Gauls waylaid men. ‘It is a habit of theirs,’ says he, ‘to stop travellers, were it even by constraint, and inquire whatsoever each of them may have heard or known about any sort of matter: in their towns, the common people beset

²⁸ *FR* 1:213.

²⁹ *FR* 1:28.

the passing trader; demanding to hear from what regions he came, what things he got acquainted with there. Excited by which rumours and hearsays they will decide about the weightiest matters; and necessarily repent next moment that they did it, on such guidance of uncertain reports, and many a traveller answering with mere fictions to please them, and get off.’³⁰

The story implicitly serves as a comment on the narrative itself. Carlyle stresses the accidental and often illogical character of history and of human actions. In contrast to the Enlightenment ideal of historiography, Carlyle stresses its impure texture, made up of warring narratives and frequently based on no more than hearsay and gossip. However, in case the reader was tempted to reject Carlyle’s whole work as a mere ‘rumour’ or a lie, Carlyle makes sure to balance this reading with the opposite perspective. In the multiplicity of voices and narratives quoted in *The French Revolution*, it is not uncommon that the apparently false narratives ultimately prove true. The fall of Verdun is introduced via a false story, which subsequently proves to be true: ‘At Paris, by lying Rumour which proved prophetic and veridical, the fall of Verdun was known some hours before it happened.’³¹ Carlyle’s vision of history as myth-mediated is inspired by the theological definition of myth as developed in German Higher Criticism. In this reading, myth is seen to be mediating truth, while Carlyle’s Calvinist sensibility sponsors the idea of the frequently unreliable and bluntly false character of human stories. History (or culture, in Carlyle’s broad understanding), seen as a thought-provoking and palimpsest-like gathering of human stories, cannot be accepted uncritically without inducing a deeper meditation and awakening the reader’s curiosity about its unobvious, frequently misleading and thoroughly symbolic dimension.

What Carlyle resents in Burke’s reading is that he explicitly claims to see the full meaning of the Revolutionary events directly, when he predicts the future development of the events in France: ‘We are now in a condition to discern, with tolerable exactness, the true nature of the object held up to our imitation.’³² Far from ‘reflecting’ the Revolution in France, Carlyle seems to suggest that the British narratives mis-reflect it through misguided trust in their own historical constructs. Fittingly, it is the devil himself that delivers the final moral lesson to the post-

³⁰ *FR* 2:109.

³¹ *FR* 2:178.

³² Burke, p. 34.

Revolutionary ideologists, who, Carlyle thinks, are guilty of a Babel-like confusion of tongues in constructing their stories with a false pretence to transparency, which vainly usurps the divine perspective. Punning on the ‘Ode to Love’, Cagliostro speaks of the ‘amorphous Corinthian brass’, an image of the self-destructive character of all human-made narratives. The implied reference to the hymn also serves to encode the Christian eschatological vision of this world which allows only for a partial and imperfect reading: ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.’ (1 Corinthians, 13:12). Echoing the first sentence of the hymn: ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal,’ (1 Corinthians, 13:1), Carlyle specifically draws attention to Christian charity, the opposite of which is respectability, in Carlyle’s (Christian) reading. Respectability is the focus of Cagliostro’s speech, seen as the main sin on which the Revolutionary terror flourishes:

Higher, higher yet flames the Fire-Sea; crackling with new dislocated timber; hissing with leather and prunella. The metal Images are molten; the marble Images become mortar-lime; the stone Mountains sulkily explode. RESPECTABILITY, with all her collected Gigs inflamed for funeral pyre, wailing, leaves the earth: not to return save under new Avatar. Imposture, how it burns, through generations: how it is burnt up; for a time. The World is black ashes; which, ah, when will they grow green? The Images all run into amorphous Corinthian brass; all Dwellings of men destroyed; the very mountains peeled and riven, the valleys black and dead: it is an empty World! Wo to them that shall be born then!³³

‘Respectability’, a term which Carlyle uses alternately with the term ‘indifferentism’,³⁴ are key concepts in Carlyle’s ethical vocabulary, which, so far, have received little serious critical attention. In a traditional Christian reading, respectability means valuing one’s position and image in the eyes of others more than the truth. In *The French Revolution* Carlyle sees it as the cardinal revolutionary sin (which, in a moral reading, he also identifies in Britain), and links it to a larger moral and spiritual indifferentism, which sees humanity as operating outside moral and spiritual reference. It is this perception of human acts as ‘morally neutral’ that deprives the actors of *The French Revolution* of their agency and renders them easy tools in the hands of the devil. The

³³ *FR* 3:323.

³⁴ Compare Carlyle’s letter to Mill: ‘You perceive, therefore, I set little store by this so celebrated virtue of Tolerance: alas, I cannot say that I have almost ever seen such a virtue; only seen, often enough and with ever-increasing dislike, Indifferentism parading itself in the stolen garments of it. “I came not into the world to bring peace, but a sword”! Such is in perhaps all cases part of the stern mission which a good man feels laid on him.’ *CL* 6: 444-450.

emblem of a respectable citizen in *The French Revolution*, to whom the epithet 'respectable' is consistently attached, is Doctor Guillotin.³⁵ Guillotin is a typical character of a good man whose morally lukewarm worldview makes him unwittingly the collaborator and tool of the Revolutionary terror. Evil germinates on Guillotin's apparently benign and humanitarian scientific projects to improve hygiene and ventilation, and to diminish the suffering of the dying convicts. He succumbs to the revolutionary demons through no apparent fault of his own, except for the sin of moral *acedia* (laziness or indifference) and almost complete lack of a spiritual perspective and of the imagination of good and evil. In an act of artistic justice, Carlyle depicts his soul after death as endlessly wandering the earth and repenting his crimes, alongside many other Gothic spectres produced by the French Revolution. The revolutionary fervour, portrayed by Carlyle as an instance of systemic evil larger than Guillotin's scientific aspirations, will use even Guillotin's apparently good (but spiritually shallow) intentions for its own evil purposes. Here is an instance, then, of Carlyle's insightful reading of evil operating on a national and even international stage, rather than only on a personal level. Guillotin's invention, which he proudly presents to the French commission becomes a symbol of science and human constructs turning against humanity. The 'Beheading Machine' is the emblem of the triumph of 'the machinery' (technology) over conscience. Through the description of Guillotin's invention, then, we are introduced into a moral scenery, that is far greater than Doctor Guillotin's conscience:

Singular Guillotin, respectable practitioner: doomed by a satiric destiny to the strangest immortal glory that ever kept obscure mortal from his resting-place, the bosom of oblivion! Guillotin can improve the ventilation of the Hall; in all cases of medical police and hygiene be a present aid: but, greater far, he can produce his 'Report on the Penal Code;' and reveal therein a cunningly devised Beheading Machine, which shall become famous and world-famous. This is the product of Guillotin's endeavours, gained not without meditation and reading; which product popular gratitude or levity christens by a feminine derivative name, as if it were his daughter: La Guillotine! 'With my machine, Messieurs, I whisk off your head (*vous fais sauter la tete*) in a twinkling, and you have no

³⁵ The adjective 'respectable' appears each time when Guillotin is mentioned: 'Worthy Doctor Guillotin, respectable practitioner in Paris, has drawn up his little 'Plan of a Cahier of doléances;'—as had he not, having the wish and gift, the clearest liberty to do? He is getting the people to sign it; whereupon the surly Parlement summons him to give an account of himself. [...] This respectable Guillotin we hope to behold once more, and perhaps only once; the Parlement not even once, but let it be engulfed unseen by us.' *FR* 1:125. And 'President Mounier, with a speedy Deputation, among whom we notice the respectable figure of Doctor Guillotin, gets himself forthwith on march.' *FR* 1: 263.

pain;’—whereat they all laugh. [...] Unfortunate Doctor! For two-and-twenty years he, unguillotined, shall near nothing but guillotine, see nothing but guillotine; then dying, shall through long centuries wander, as it were, a disconsolate ghost, on the wrong side of Styx and Lethe; his name like to outlive Caesar’s.³⁶

We can appreciate here the ‘tragicomic’ effect in Carlyle’s moral presentation of Guillotin, which comes from the fact that his good intentions turn against him. The larger structures of evil within which Guillotin operates mean that his inventions will become used in the promulgation of political terror and his name will be infamously associated with its chief political tool. Although Carlyle believes that the nation’s narrow focus on science and neglect of larger imaginative exercise of conscience, facilitates the progress of evil, evil is nevertheless a mysterious and altogether spiritual phenomenon, which is ultimately inexplicable. Despite the moral reflection on Guillotin’s moral naivety, it seems equally possible that his intentions are genuinely good, and that his sins of vanity and narrow-mindedness are, at least partly, expiated. Carlyle’s gently humorous address to the doctor seems to suggest that he is taking a mild and moderate stance on the imperfections of human nature, and on the human wish to control the forces ultimately beyond our control with such a weak weapon as science.

In the description of Doctor Guillotin Carlyle is also making a comment on the British Whigs whom he similarly describes in his correspondence as the ones whose creed is sheer ‘respectability’. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which Carlyle in *Chartism* (1839) describes as a ‘half-truth’ capable of helping the British society, arguably appears here in a much more sinister light. Commenting on the newly started series of articles by John Stuart Mill attacking the Whig government, Carlyle writes in a letter to the author:

I recognised your criticism of the poor Whig Ministry almost at the second sentence. [...] Unbelieving mediocrity, barren, dead and death-giving, speaks itself forth more and more in all they do and dream. The true Atheist in these days is the Whig; he worships and can worship nothing but Respectability; and this he knows, unhappy man, to be—nothing but a two-wheeled vehicle! The Tory is an Idolater; the Radical a wild heathen Iconoclast: yet neither of them strictly are “without God in the world”: the one has an infinite hope, the other an infinite remembrance; both may be men and not gimgen.³⁷

³⁶ FR 1: 142-3.

³⁷ CL 7:20-26.

Similarly to Guillotin, the Whigs' sin consists in their lack of imagination of the supernatural, which opens the door to evil. Evil is a phenomenon which is either altogether missing or drastically reduced in the Whig's utilitarian grammar to that which is not beneficial to the state. In the Whig line of history, evil is constructed as a simple lack or underdevelopment of civilisation, which is to be improved and finally removed altogether from human history, meaning that Guillotin's collaboration in the revolutionary terror ultimately lacks a (moral) language of description (until the 1830s, the British Whigs lack a proper language to describe the French Revolution). In *The French Revolution* Carlyle depicts Guillotin as a bearer of the language of improvement, which in Britain would have been known to Carlyle first-hand through the writings of Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800 - 1859). Macaulay's famous depiction of the history of Great Britain as that 'of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement' can serve as an example:

the history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement. Those who compare the age on which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in their imagination may talk of degeneracy and decay: but no man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of the present.³⁸

Carlyle has little patience for Macaulay, whom he describes (after meeting him in person) as '*valde mediocris homo*' (a truly mediocre man), and 'the sublime of Commonplace.'³⁹

He speaks with a kind of gowsting emphasis; laughs occasionally (not at things really ludicrous, but when a laugh is demanded by the exigencies of the case) with a loud wooden but frank and goodnatured tone:—he is on the whole a man of really peaceable kindly temper, and superior sincerity in his Whig way;—a strange flat-soled awkwardness in him under all his shining rhetoric:—now and then he reminded me of a spiritual Hippopotamus; and we cheerfully let him shine as 'the sublime of Commonplace.' I felt him really to be a loss when he went yesterday morning.⁴⁰

Aside from his 'shining rhetoric', Macaulay is 'a spiritual Hippopotamus', awkward and unimaginative in the sphere of the supernatural, even though he is honest and good-

³⁸ Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 3.

³⁹ *CL* 26: 273-275.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

natured in all other respects. ‘The sublime of Commonplace’ marks Carlyle’s recognition of the momentous character of Macaulay’s narrow perspective, his rejection of the spiritual for the ‘commonplace’, an attitude which, in Carlyle’s symbolic depiction of Guillotin, has tragic consequences for the whole nation. Significantly for my argument in this chapter, after reading Carlyle’s ‘Characteristics’, Macaulay links Carlyle’s style to that of Edward Irving. This is, arguably, not only an expression of Macaulay’s sarcasm and dislike of Carlyle, but also a real difficulty in noticing the difference between Irving’s fanaticism and Carlyle’s spiritual vision. In Macaulay’s Whig disregard of metaphysics, both Irving and Carlyle appear as equally absurd and unintelligible. In a letter to Macvey Napier, the editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, Macaulay comments cynically: ‘as to Carlyle, or Carlisle, or whatever his name may be, he might as well write in Irving’s unknown tongue at once.’⁴¹

However, Macaulay’s comment can also help us nuance Carlyle’s complex political stance. The prophetic religious style of politics characteristic of Puritan old style Whiggism by the age of Addison’s *Spectator* had given way to the ideal of politeness brandished by the Scottish Enlightenment. J. G. A. Pocock notes that ‘[t]he ideal of politeness had first appeared in the Restoration, where it formed part of the latitudinarian campaign to replace prophetic by social religiosity.’⁴² Pocock notes that the ‘Whiggism of the polite kind’ divorced itself radically from its Puritan roots, while becoming closely associated with Anglican rather than Scottish Puritan religion.’⁴³ Whereas Whiggism grew out of the covenanting culture of the seventeenth century (‘Whiggamaire’ being a term of abuse for Covenanting rebels⁴⁴), by the nineteenth century it had undergone some radical transformations which had distanced it from its origins perceived through the lenses of progress as fanatical and no longer acceptable in the current civilisational stage of the society. During Enlightenment Whiggism became closely associated with the ideology of civilisational progress, improvement and tolerant sociability, while the association of the social with the moral has led Macaulay to discredit the Covenanting movement as unsocial.⁴⁵ As Burrow notes, the Victorian

⁴¹ Sorensen, ‘Macaulay’, in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 300.

⁴² J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 236.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Robert William, ‘The Origins of ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’, *The Historical Journal*, XVII, 2 (1974), pp. 247-264, p. 252.

⁴⁵ Compare: J. W. Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 32-33.

distaste for the eighteenth century led many nineteenth-century thinkers to draw radical lines of contrast between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, constructing the image of Burke as a solitary figure either dis severed from the earlier thought or seen as ‘a summation of everything that might still be worth knowing about eighteenth-century political thought.’⁴⁶ The resulting image of Burke as a conservative is therefore misleading since Burke can be seen as a continuator of the Whig ideology of the civilising effect of manners, while he also re-links it to its roots in religion and chivalric code. Whereas traditionally the civilising effect of manners that Burke proposes was seen as the offspring of the commercial society, Burke reverses the order by claiming that it is religion and chivalry which are at the roots of the civilised manners.

Both Burrow and Peacock describe with considerable detail the varieties of English Whiggism in the nineteenth century, which elude any easy classification. Interestingly, Burrow identifies Scottish cosmopolitanism in the Scottish Enlightenment tradition as at odds with the Whig culture which is typically insular. Whereas Burke sees ‘the English people weaving the fabric of a free constitution, spider-like, out of its own entrails’,⁴⁷ the Scottish (Enlightenment) conception of the growth of liberty is woven into the larger history of international civilisational progress. By the age of Macaulay, the English historiographic vision becomes the dominant one, while the Scottish contribution is often used to heighten the uniqueness of English history.⁴⁸ By the late eighteenth-century the Presbyterian reading of the role of Reformation and the Covenanting movements in the Whig reading of the progress of civil liberty had been questioned and largely dismissed. Colin Kidd argues that ‘only among the Seceders did a full-blown whig-presbyterian historiography survive.’⁴⁹ Scottish Whig historians in Kidd’s reading are seen as failing to construct a properly Scottish ideology of progress in the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth-centuries. In the English Whig narrative Scottish covenanting history became depicted as barbarian and uncivilised. In this light, Carlyle’s personal style and Calvinist Seceder upbringing can be seen to drive from and develop the earlier Scottish Whig tradition, by and large discarded in the nineteenth century, while at the same time questioning the English Whiggism of the nineteenth-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Burrow, *A Liberal Dissent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁹ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 200.

century developed in the writings of Macaulay and English Victorian historians. The impassioned, prophetic style developed by Thomas Chalmers and Edward Irving can perhaps be seen as the true inheritors of the old Scottish Whig tradition. There can be no doubt that while Carlyle ridicules Irving's prophetic style, he is deeply influenced by it and draws heavily both from its rhetorical potential, and the idea of a public man of letters as a religious prophet castigating his age for its shortcomings and reading the signs of the times.

A persistent criticism of Carlyle's *French Revolution* has claimed that its dramatic style of narration lacks some of the typical qualities of the Whig historical school. Charles Harding Firth (1857–1936), for example, claims in *A Commentary on Macaulay's 'History of England'* (1938) that Macaulay's 'long, sustained, harmonious narrative' has no parallel in the nineteenth-century historical writing:

Since Macaulay himself there has been only one great narrative historian, Froude, and he is in many ways inferior to Macaulay. Other recent historians, whatever learning and whatever literary merits they possessed, did not possess the art of telling a story: they were able at most to describe a scene or relate an episode, but the long, sustained, harmonious narrative, was above their powers or below their aims.⁵⁰

In contrast with such a view of Carlyle's history, Marylu Hill locates *The French Revolution* in juxtaposition to the Enlightenment values of historicism:

The main characteristics of the Enlightenment historicism include a sense of detachment and critical distance on the part of the historian; a concern for discerning the rational truth about a given historical period; a commitment to a scientific dissection of evidence; and an assumption that the present possesses a superior vantage point from which to ascertain the truth.⁵¹

However, what I have been arguing so far is that instead of looking at Carlyle's narrative as (principally) a challenge to the Enlightenment project of history, we can see it as specifically directed against the nineteenth-century Whig historical agenda. The equivalent of the Whigs in *The French Revolution* are the Girondins, 'men of fervid Constitutional principles; of quick talent, irrefragable logic, clear respectability; who

⁵⁰ Charles Harding Firth, *A Commentary on Macaulay's 'History of England'* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 1.

⁵¹ Marylu Hill, 'Reason and Revelation in Carlyle's Historical Essays', in *Literature and Belief*, p. 124.

will have the Reign of Liberty establish itself, but only by respectable methods.’⁵² Similarly to the Whigs, the Girondins are a political class lacking a language for the spiritual, which renders their morality too volatile and ultimately indecisive, always suspended ‘between their dilemma-horns’ (punning on the horns of the devil, who thrives in this indecisiveness):

How many poor Girondins are sure of but one thing: That a man and Girondin ought to have footing somewhere, and to stand firmly on it; keeping well with the Respectable Classes! This is what conviction and assurance of faith they have. They must wriggle painfully between their dilemma-horns.⁵³

This inability to decide between good and evil climaxes in the question of guillotining the king. The Girondins’ moral apathy leads them to the inability to make a decision and, due to this fundamental weakness, they are left at the mercy of the radical Jacobins:

Regicide? asks the Gironde Respectability: To kill a king, and become the horror of respectable nations and persons? But then also, to save a king; to lose one’s footing with the decided Patriot; and undecided Patriot, though never so respectable, being mere hypothetic froth and no footing?—The dilemma presses sore; and between the horns of it you wriggle round and round. Decision is nowhere, save in the Mother Society and her Sons. These have decided, and go forward: the others wriggle round uneasily within their dilemma-horns, and make way nowhither.⁵⁴

With the progress of the Revolution, the Girondins remain passive readers of reality, unable to come up with a political and moral language in answer to the social, political and moral crises:

Nay the truth is, Patriotism throughout, were it never so white-frilled, logical, respectable, must either lean itself heartily on Sansculottism, the black, bottomless; or else vanish, in the frightfullest way, to Limbo! Thus some, with upturned nose, will altogether sniff and disdain Sansculottism; others will lean heartily on it; nay others again will lean what we call heartlessly on it: three sorts; each sort with a destiny corresponding.⁵⁵

The Girondins inhabit a sphere of spiritual and moral ‘limbo’, which Carlyle sees as the true atheism in the sense that it channels indifferentism, the opposite of Christian love. Their moral passivity makes them similar to the somnambulist actors of ‘The Diamond

⁵² *FR* 2:206.

⁵³ *FR* 3:97.

⁵⁴ *FR* 3:86.

⁵⁵ *FR* 2:243-4.

Necklace', who willingly reject their use of conscience and, in this way, choose to live in a Gothic and ghost-like sphere of discarded values and apparitions, between dream and reality, in which the devil apparently enjoys free reign. The exuberant use of the sublime language in *The French Revolution*, teeming with echoes of the Old Testament, can be seen as a challenge to the utilitarian agenda which cuts man off from the supernatural (the figures of tailors, *Sartor*, *Schneider* or 'cutter', working as symbols of contemporary man's estrangement from the spiritual language).

Carlyle's moral reading is also directed against the French representative of the progressive reading of history, Marquis de Condorcet. Among the gathering of Girondins, Carlyle is careful to take note of the presence of one of the most famous French revolutionary ideologues:

Round whom others of like temper will gather; known by and by as Girondins, to the sorrowing wonder of the world. Of which sort note Condorcet, Marquis and Philosopher; [...] a notable Condorcet, with stoical Roman face, and fiery heart; 'volcano hid under snow;' styled likewise, in irreverent language, 'mouton enrage,' peaceablest of creatures bitten rabid!⁵⁶

Condorcet is another resounding voice in *The French Revolution* whose ideas on progress and language Carlyle addresses. In the *Outlines of an historical view of the progress of the human mind* Marquis de Condorcet (1795) claims that in an unending process of moral improvement, humanity removes its old mythical garnitures, which are no more than linguistic constructs. Condorcet rejects all supernatural reference of language and translates religious symbolism into merely political language. What we see happening in Condorcet's thought is that religion is removed from the discourse of civilisation and delegated to the sphere of 'the barbarous'.⁵⁷ In Condorcet's view, religion is no more than a man-made myth that needs to be translated back into its

⁵⁶ *FR* 2:206.

⁵⁷ Compare Condorcet: '[T]he language, the memorials, employed in expressing [...] metaphysical opinions, [...] exhibited to the eyes of the people the most extravagant system of mythology, and became the foundation of creeds the most absurd, modes of worship the most senseless, and practices the most shameful and barbarous. Such is the origin of almost all the religions that are known to us, and which the hypocrisy or the extravagance of their inventors and their proselytes afterwards loaded with new fables. The same use was made by the priests of their sacred writing. The people saw men, animals, monsters, where the priests meant only to represent an astronomical phenomenon, an historical occurrence of the year.' Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an historical view of the progress of the human mind* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1796), pp. 58-9.

supposed *lingua materna* of scientific discourse.⁵⁸ Condorcet's most famous statement that human scientific and moral progress is endless and unlimited and can never lead humanity backwards, is one among the founding creeds of the Victorian age and one which comes under Carlyle's specific attack:⁵⁹

[T]he perfectibility of man is absolutely indefinite; that the progress of this perfectibility, henceforth above the control of every power that would impede it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has placed us. The course of this progress may doubtless be more or less rapid, but it can never be retrograde.⁶⁰

Condorcet's construction of humanity's moral progress is also founded upon a linguistic project of a de-mythologised scientific language, which will be self-evident and transparent to everyone:

A grand basis of every kind of sound philosophy is to form for each science a precise and accurate language, every term of which shall represent an idea exactly determined and circumscribed; and to enable ourselves to determine and circumscribe the ideas with which the science may be conversant, by the mode of a rigorous analysis.⁶¹

The dark, complicated, and myth-mediated linguistic and textual terrain of *The French Revolution* can be seen as an antithesis of Condorcet's linguistic model. Ironically, the revolutionary miscommunication, in Carlyle's depiction, is sponsored precisely by a botched cultural deal, which Robespierre implements in an attempt to replace the 'old' Christian cultural language with a supposedly much more scientific and rational social creed.⁶² However, while Carlyle castigates the Gothic cruelty of Robespierre's reign, his is not a unique example of humanity's absurd and contradictory behaviour. Carlyle quotes a list of French kings who professed to act in the name of religion, while their treatment of their subjects was little better than Robespierre's. Humanity, in Carlyle's symbolic depiction, treads on a dangerous terrain of the

⁵⁸ 'Men, whose interest it was to deceive, soon felt a dislike to the pursuit of truth. Content with the docility of the people, they conceived there was no need of further means to secure its continuance. By degrees they forgot a part of the truths concealed under their allegories; they preserved no more of their ancient science than was strictly necessary to maintain the confidence of their disciples; and at last they became themselves the dupes of their own fables.' *Ibid.* p. 60.

⁵⁹ Cf. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 27-53.

⁶⁰ Condorcet, p. 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶² Compare Desaulniers's discussion of the influence of the Gothic imagery of Goethe's Faust, which stages a similar botched transaction with the devil. Desaulniers, 'Faustian Analogues', in *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror*, pp. 34-59.

operation of the forces of good and evil, a terrain that is not safe and stable (as Condorcet would have it), but rather (in Carlyle's postlapsarian imagery) replenished with dangerous 'oubliettes'. Known also as bottle dungeons, oubliettes are a form of dungeons which are accessible only from a hatch in a high ceiling, and become in the nineteenth-century the emblems of tyrannical power.⁶³ Described by Carlyle as 'man-eating', they are transformed, in Carlyle's spiritual imagery, into the traps set by the devil in this world, in order to lure specifically those who have forgotten about his existence (French 'oublier', to forget). Operating on the surface and ignoring the existence of the spiritual in this world predisposes humanity to become easy victims of the devil. Carlyle's oubliettes also reflect the loss of historical memory, which equally facilitates the demonic operation in this world. The last sentence, in Carlyle's typically casual and offhandish manner, restores the spiritual balance in the narrative. Divine providence operates through the imperfect human conduct, mysteriously bringing good out of botched human moral behaviour:

So far had accident and forethought; had your Louis Elevenths, with the leaden Virgin in their hatband, and torture-wheels and conical oubliettes (man-eating!) under their feet; your Henri Fourths, with their prophesied social millennium, 'when every peasant should have his fowl in the pot;' and on the whole, the fertility of this most fertile Existence (named of Good and Evil),—brought it, in the matter of the Kingship. Wondrous! Concerning which may we not again say, that in the huge mass of Evil, as it rolls and swells, there is ever some Good working imprisoned; working towards deliverance and triumph?⁶⁴

The closest that we get to the devil's explicit operation in *The French Revolution*, is arguably in the closing speech to the reader, whereby Carlyle presents a 'beatific vision' of human communion founded on the 'sacred relation' of the reader and the author. The narrator's pious speech and exaggerated imagery, with all the connotations of Irving's 'tongues' and Carlyle's suspicion of all moral rectitude, signal demonic influence. This is also seen in the imagery that Carlyle uses. The 'embodied' and 'disembodied' spirits of his readers recall the imaginary 'skinning' operations of the devil in *Sartor Resartus*; as does also Carlyle's reference to the reader as his 'beloved shade', signalling the dark forces. As we have already seen, 'Leibhaftiger' ('Embodied'), in Carlyle's German-rooted vocabulary, is a reference to the devil, while

⁶³ Göran Blix, 'The Prison-House of Revolutionary Memory: The Politics of Oblivion in Michelet, Hugo, and Dumas', *French Forum*, 32:3 (2007), 39-64.

⁶⁴ *FR* 1: 10.

the ‘incarnate Word’ is reminiscent of Irving’s claims to divine prophecy, which Carlyle ridicules elsewhere. We are treading a slippery linguistic terrain again:

And so here, O Reader, has the time come for us two to part. Toilsome was our journeying together; not without offence; but it is done. To me thou wert as a beloved shade, the disembodied or not yet embodied spirit of a Brother. To thee I was but as a Voice. Yet was our relation a kind of sacred one; doubt not that! Whatsoever once sacred things become hollow jargons, yet while the Voice of Man speaks with Man, hast thou not there the living fountain out of which all sacrednesses sprang, and will yet spring? Man, by the nature of him, is definable as ‘an incarnated Word.’ Ill stands it with me if I have spoken falsely: thine also it was to hear truly. Farewell.⁶⁵

Whereas this passage has generally been read at face value, as the author’s farewell and his faith in being able to establish a ‘sacred communion’ of understanding with the reader,⁶⁶ it is hardly credible given that, in Carlyle’s joke, it is preceded in the text by a quote from Cagliostro’s speech to his ‘fellow scoundrels’, which aims precisely to establish a demonic communion of (evil) interests. Carlyle’s high-spirited farewell with the reader can be read, in this light, as a parody on the last words that the devil directs to his faithful followers in ‘The Diamond Necklace’, whereby he dramatically dismisses his congregation:

Our Act hangs indissoluble together; floats wondrous in the older and older memory of men: while we the little band of Scoundrels, who saw each other, now hover so far asunder, to see each other no more,—if not once more only on the universal Doomsday, the Last of the Days!⁶⁷

All in all, Carlyle’s ecclesiastical idiom and his assurance of the sacredness of his relationship to the reader in *The French Revolution* can be read as cynical comments on the side. The ‘sacred’ pact between the author and the reader should be seen, in a sarcastic sense, as words of assurance that whatever ‘barbarity’ has been happening in France, as long as the two of us stick together and stay away from the trouble, there is no need to think about the French Revolution and seek any ‘communion’ with the French nation. In Carlyle’s sceptical perception of all explicitly ‘sacred’ and pious moral idioms, this marks yet again a rather devilish return to the ‘respectable’ and

⁶⁵ *FR* 3: 323.

⁶⁶ Compare: Desaulniers, pp. 64-5: ‘[I]n this concluding address to the reader, Carlyle refers to their relationship as a sacred one – an ‘incarnated Word’ – for while he, the author, was “but as a Voice,” the reader’s participation in this voice transforms the “voice” into living speech [...]. Author and reader stand together, a sacred brotherhood, their “[t]oilsome ... journeying” [...] done. Through this brotherhood of the “incarnate Word,” Carlyle criticizes the contractarian brotherhood of Revolutionary ideology.’

⁶⁷ ‘Diamond Necklace’, p. 143.

indifferent tongue which Carlyle has been criticising all along. In a playful medieval spirit, Carlyle hangs the final curtain with more questions than answers. *The French Revolution* is distinctly not a Whig tale of instruction from which the reader comes out morally uplifted, instructed, and 'improved', and requires a deeper engagement of the reader's meditative powers than a net agreement with the narrator's deluded and deceptive voice.

Carlyle's moral discussion must be seen within the context of a search for a new spiritual tongue in *The French Revolution* which is rooted in his dialogue and correspondence with John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873). In his early perception of the Revolution, Mill presents the Revolution enthusiastically as an epic event in modern times, which presupposes a radical change in the social, political and even poetical grammar of the era:

[The French Revolution] was marked by a characteristic still more embarrassing to such men as those by whom history is commonly written. The moving forces in this vast convulsion, the springs by which so much complex machinery was now set in motion, now stopt, now swept away, were of a class for the laws of whose action the dictionary of historical common-places does not yet afford one established formula - a class which the routine-historian has not yet been taught by familiarity to fancy that he understands.⁶⁸

The quote comes from Mill's review of Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1827), published in *Westminster Review* in 1828. Written at the climax of Mill's enthusiasm for the Revolution which channels for Mill the middle-class reform movement in Britain, it depicts his early belief in the political sovereignty of the nation. Mill dismisses Scott's position which he sees as Britain-centred. He cynically summarises Scott's politics: 'whatever is English is best; best, not for England only, but for every country in Christendom, or probably the world.'⁶⁹ Scott also fails to grasp the moral significance of the French Revolution (something that Mill will yet emphasise in his review of Alison's *History of the French Revolution* (1833)⁷⁰). For Mill, the

⁶⁸ Mill, 'The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte, Emperor of the French. With a Preliminary View of the French Revolution', *The Westminster Review*, 9 (1828), 251-313 (p. 58).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁰ 'All political revolutions, not effected by foreign conquest, originate in moral revolutions. The subversion of established institutions is merely one consequence of the previous subversion of established opinions. The hundred political revolutions of the last three centuries were but a few outward manifestations of a moral revolution, which dates from the great breaking loose of the human faculties commonly described as the 'revival of letters,' and of which the main instrument and agent was the invention of printing. How much of the course of that moral revolution yet remains to be run, or how

Revolution defies all existing rules of historical description and demands the creation of an altogether new historical diction which will grant a much more prominent role to the French people as a political subject. The new type of historian, whom Mill envisions, will need to reject old historical grammars and ‘draw his philosophy from the primeval fountain of human nature itself.’ Scott is guilty of depicting his history in the old diction and of neglecting the role played by the people as historical agents, of which he knows no more, Mill thinks, than ‘a child in the cradle.’ At the same time, the role of the new type of historian envisioned by Mill will be to reject old historical narratives and construct a new tongue for painting the historical processes:

The rules by which such a period is to be judged of, must not be common rules: [...] The man who is yet to come, the philosophical historian of the French Revolution, will leave these solemn plausibilities far behind, and will draw his philosophy from the primeval fountain of human nature itself. Whatever else he may derive from what are called the records of past times, a lesson which he will *not* learn from them is, what is meant by a *people*; or from what causes, and in obedience to what laws, the *thing*, which that name expresses, is accustomed to act.⁷¹

In the process of writing *The French Revolution*, Carlyle regularly exchanged ideas with Mill in their correspondence and Mill’s initial enthusiasm, as well as his visit to France during July Revolution, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, were powerful sources and incentives to Carlyle’s revolutionary thought.⁷² The ideas of the vital (in Carlyle’s tongue: *sublime*) importance of recent French history, as well as of its novelty, which demands from the artistic reader of history the creation of an altogether new language of depiction, will inspire Carlyle’s work long after Mill has renounced his early fascination with the Revolution and delegated it to the dusty annals written in service of ‘humanity’s progress’, but otherwise of little consequence or interest. Given Carlyle’s later political conservatism which would finally lead him to end his friendship with Mill, this early dialogue with Mill’s liberalism is worth a closer look. Mill’s early friendship with Carlyle falls also into the period of their common fascination with the

many political revolutions it will yet generate before it be exhausted no one can foretell. But it must be the shallowest view of the French Revolution, which can *now* consider it as any thing but a mere *incident* in great change in man himself, in his belief, in his principles of conduct, and therefore in the outward arrangements of society. A change which is but half completed, and which is now in a state of more rapid progress here in England, than any where else.’ Mill, ‘Alison’s History of the French Revolution’, *Monthly Repository* 7 (1833), 507-11, and 513-16 (p. 513).

⁷¹ Mill, ‘The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte’, p. 59.

⁷² Mill had also been sending Carlyle the radical *Examiner*, to which he regularly contributed with his opinions on the Revolution, as well as historical books and actively exchanged opinions prior to and in the process of Carlyle’s writing of *The French Revolution* in their correspondence.

French school of Saint-Simonians, from whom Mill draws his early ‘mysticism’.⁷³ In Carlyle’s correspondence with Mill we can appreciate the main differences in their historical perceptions, next to the similarities and common fascination with the Revolution. Whereas for Mill, the Revolution primarily marks a social and political change, Carlyle is more interested in it as a spiritual event in human history. From the beginning of their acquaintance he is also deeply suspicious of Mill’s idea that the Revolution connotes a form of moral progress of humanity, as well as being much more sceptical than Mill about the British utilitarian programme of reform, with its crowning event, the New Poor Law of 1834.⁷⁴ He plainly refuses to accept Mill’s optimistic view of the improvement of the situation of the poor in Britain.⁷⁵ Yet, Mill’s enthusiastic call for the new historical-poetical grammar, which the Revolution initiates, and his description of the confusion of tongues which abounds in the historical assessments of the events in France are in tune with Carlyle’s own ideas.⁷⁶

Mill develops his ideas about the Revolution in a series of articles published in the *Examiner* under the title ‘The Spirit of the Age’ beginning in 1831, which earned him Carlyle’s praise as the work of ‘a new Mystic’,⁷⁷ based primarily on his rejection of the Whig historical school. He depicts the era as a period of transition when ‘mankind have outgrown old institutions and doctrines, but have not yet acquired new ones.’⁷⁸ In

⁷³ Mary Baumgarten, ‘Mill’, in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 323. For Carlyle’s short infatuation with the Saint-Simonianism compare: Hill Shine, *Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians: The Concept of Historical Periodicity* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971).

⁷⁴ Cf. Patrick J. Welch, ‘Thomas Carlyle on Utilitarianism’, *History of Political Economy* 38:2 (2006), 377-389.

⁷⁵ Compare Carlyle’s letter to Mill: ‘I do not know that my train of argument would have specially led me to insist on the question you allude to: but if it had—! In fact it were a right cheerful thing for me could I get to see that general improvement were going on there; and I think I should in that case wash my hands of Radicalism forever and a day. Ah me, it is a bitter mockery to talk of “improvement” to the men I have known! Ebenezer Elliot is with me; Machinery, and Population increasing 1200 a day, are with me. Francis Place is against me, a man entitled to be heard. As to “Commissioners” and their evidence I do verily take it all to be worth almost nothing in that matter; your answer is according to your question, and your questionee,—“as the fool thinks the bell clinks,” and all things whatsoever can be demonstrated if you choose your man.’ *CL* 10:14-15.

⁷⁶ By 1833 in a letter to Carlyle Mill criticises the ‘barrenness’ of the discussion of the Revolution in France and the lack of new perspectives: ‘One of the seceding members writes of them in the *Revue Encyclopédique* that the St Simonian society is the only spiritual fruit of the Revolution of 1830: the excessive avidity & barrenness of the French mind has never been so strikingly displayed: there are such numbers of talkers & writers so full of noise and fury, keeping it up for years and years, and not one new thought, new to them I mean, has been struck out by all the collisions since I first began attending to these matters.’ *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 12, ed. by Francis E. Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 150.

⁷⁷ *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by John Jacob Coss (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), p. 122.

⁷⁸ *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, ed. by Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 26.

the review of Scott's *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, Mill locates the essence of the change in the political and aesthetic grammar of the times, which shift the idea of heroism from single actors to the masses of people as a plural hero. In contrast to his later disillusioned attitude after the July Revolution of 1830, when he will increasingly see the French as passive victims of the larger historical forces,⁷⁹ here Mill brandishes his enthusiastic, active and truly dramatic view of the Revolution as the 'work of the people, defended by the people':

Heretofore, when a change of government had been effected by force in an extensive and populous country, the revolution had been made always by, and commonly for, a few: the French Revolution was emphatically the work of the people, defended by the people with a heroism and self-devotion unexampled in any other period of modern history [...] That mighty power, of which, but for the French Revolution, mankind perhaps would never have known the surpassing strength - that force which converts a whole people into heroes, which binds an entire nation together as one man, was able, not merely to overpower the other forces, but to draw them into its own line, and convert them into auxiliaries to itself.⁸⁰

In *The French Revolution* Carlyle echoes Mill's aesthetics in embedding his history in the revolutionary action of the French nation.⁸¹ The perception of the Revolution as an event initiating a new poetical language is developed by Carlyle most fully in a letter to Mill from 1833, where he clearly imitates Mill's passionate tongue by calling the Revolution 'the grand Poem of our Time' and proclaiming it the key to a deep, and even mystical, understanding of history:

It is properly the grand work of our era [...] in this, in the right understanding of this, is involved all possible knowledge important for us; and yet at the present hour our ignorance of it in England is probably as bad as total (for Error is infinitely worse than Ignorance); and in France itself knowledge seems only just beginning. Understand me all those sectionary tumults, convention-harangues, guillotine holocausts, Brunswick discomfitures; exhaust me the meaning of it! You cannot; for

⁷⁹ *John Stuart Mill: Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, ed. by John Cunningham Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 339.

⁸⁰ *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, p. 58.

⁸¹ However, unlike Mill, Carlyle's treatment of the French nation as a unified mass, simultaneously emphatically focuses on the role of the individuals which form the crowd: 'Another question which at every new turn will rise on us, requiring ever new reply is this: Where the French Revolution specially is? In the King's Palace, in his Majesty's or her Majesty's managements, and maltreatments, cabals, imbecilities and woes, answer some few:—whom we do not answer. In the National Assembly, answer a large mixed multitude [...] The National Assembly, named now Constituent Assembly, goes its course; making the Constitution; but the French Revolution also goes its course. In general, may we not say that the French Revolution lies in the heart and head of every violent-speaking, of every violent-thinking French Man?' *FR* 1:214.

it is a flaming Reality; the depths of Eternity look thro' the chinks of that so convulsed section of Time;—as thro all sections of Time, only to dull eyes not so visibly. To me, it often seems, as if the right History (that impossible thing I mean by History) of the French Revolution were the grand Poem of our Time.⁸²

What we can clearly see here is that while Mill mediates for Carlyle the fascination with the new aesthetics which are being born with the outbreak of the Revolution, yet Carlyle translates Mill's language immediately into his characteristic Biblical and distinctly Christian vision of history as a place of meeting between the natural and supernatural orders. It is this frequently clashing, complex, and 'impure' meeting in the texture of history in which eternity is clumsily, often erroneously but quite distinctly embodied in historical narrative, that constitutes the essence of the sublime character of the Revolution. To Mill, the Revolution is a poetic event, for Carlyle it is a distinctly epic and sublime one. Without reading the French signs of the times and making sense of what happened in France, Europe cannot understand itself. For Mill it is a crucial political and aesthetic event, for Carlyle it is foremost a *spiritual* one, upon which humanity must reflect meditatively, via symbols and images, rather than simply in a social or political manner. In another letter to Mill Carlyle asks: 'Is not all Poetry the essence of Reality (could one but get at such essence), and true History the only possible Epic?'.⁸³ Carlyle is here systematically translating Mill's idiom into a Christian tongue, for which the epic genre is the most apposite and natural channel because it presupposes the existence of a larger (supernatural) order, which the narrative must take into account and reflect. Carlyle's chosen genre can be seen, in this sense, as an answer to the loss of a holistic vision of humanity and the universe in contemporary Britain.

Carlyle stresses the dramatic and momentous character of the Revolution further in his review of François Mignet's *Parliamentary History of the French Revolution* commissioned by Mill for *The Westminster Review* in 1837. Carlyle begins:

It appears to be, if not stated in words, yet tacitly felt and understood everywhere, that the event of these modern ages is the French Revolution. A huge explosion, bursting through all formulas and customs; confounding into wreck and chaos the ordered arrangements of earthly

⁸² CL 6:444-450.

⁸³ CL 7:20-26.

life; blotting out, one may say, the very firmament and skyey loadstars, - though only for a season.⁸⁴

The French Revolution obfuscates and questions the very existence of the supernatural, symbolised by the firmament and 'skyey loadstars' (stars used for navigation), only to ultimately dramatically confirm its existence, in Carlyle's reading. This momentous, dramatic role played by the Revolution in human history is what Mignet's formalistic, lifeless and distinctly *undramatic* narration misses altogether:

So uncommonly *lively* are these Abstractions (at bottom only occurrences, similitudes, days of the month, and such like), which rumble here in the historical head! Abstractions really of the most lively, insurrectionary character.⁸⁵

The unimaginative, abstract character of Mignet's work and its lack of a larger (spiritual) dimension are expressed in the symbol of mechanical praying, the recurrent imagery linked to Carlyle's critique of the progressive loss of the spiritual dimension of life in the nineteenth-century reduction of the rational to that which is empirically and scientifically demonstrable. Mignet's history is distinctly 'mechanical' and non-inductive to moral thinking (because it is lifeless, abstract and unimaginative):

Just so, indeed, do true Kalmuck people pray: quantities of written prayers are put in some rotary pipkin or calabash [...] this the devotee has only to whirl and churn; so long as he whirls, it is prayer; when he ceases whirling, the prayer is done. Alas! this is a sore error, very generally, among French thinkers of the present time.⁸⁶

In place of Christian prayer, symbolic of a spiritual reflection on history and expression of humanity's active and often dramatic connection with the divine, Mignet's text performs a mechanical (neither divine nor human), disengaged 'rambling of the rotatory calabash'. Carlyle's point here is perhaps most importantly the notion that history-reading, like human prayer, requires an active engagement of all human powers, moral, spiritual, intellectual and emotional. Only then, can it be regarded as fully human, and, as such, dialogical and truly dramatic:

There is, indeed, here and there, considerable rumbling of the rotatory calabash, which rattles and rumbles, concerning Progress of the Species, *Doctrine du Progrès, Exploitations, le Christ, le Verbe*, and what not;

⁸⁴ CME 4:119.

⁸⁵ CME 4:122.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

written in a vein of deep, even of intense seriousness; but profitable, one would think, to no man or woman.⁸⁷

Carlyle is specifically arguing against Mignet's deterministic vision of the Revolution as a grand historical force. In Mignet's reading, humanity is seen as no more than an instrument in the hands of Providence (whereas, as we have seen, it is the devil who is the true grand utilitarian in Carlyle's reading). Carlyle's own vivid theatrical narration contrasts with what he describes as Mignet's lifeless and 'mechanical' style. Mignet's deterministic outlook is conveyed primarily through his choice of vocabulary and grammar (large extracts written in passive voice). Carlyle's description of Mignet's language, which he regards as constitutive of his deterministic message, has been confirmed in later historical criticism:

Mignet conveys his interpretation more often by tone than explicitly. Hundreds of statements are given in the passive voice or in an impersonal way. [...] The cumulative effect of this tone is to suggest an impersonal agency as the actor behind the scenes. Sometimes the 'laws of progress' are more explicitly stated. [...] Above all the impression of 'necessity' and inner justification is obtained through lack of moral judgment and through the presentation of the Terror as the action of a war government against enemies.⁸⁸

Carlyle compares Mignet's style to what he sees as equally undramatic history of Adolphe Thiers (1797 - 1877). Thiers's narrative technique also presents his actors as passive victims of larger historical forces, a technique which Carlyle sees not only as abstract but also distinctly *inhuman*: 'A superficial air of order, of clearness, calm candour, is spread over the work; but inwardly, it is waste, inorganic; no human head that honestly tries can conceive the French Revolution *so*.'⁸⁹ In a letter to Mill, discussing Thiers's *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1823-1827), Carlyle criticises Thiers's history for its moral relativism. Thiers presents the progress of the Revolution in terms of a necessary historical law, where Robespierre is the only bearer of the sublime (active) language. He is presented as a Miltonic hero addressing his compatriots in speeches which earn him an explicit praise from Thiers. Thiers's hero-worship of Robespierre, against which Carlyle protests, can be gauged from his depiction of

⁸⁷ CME 4:134.

⁸⁸ Hedva Ben Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 60.

⁸⁹ CME 4:120.

Robespierre as ‘one of the most odious beings’ who was yet decidedly, in spite of his baseness a moral example, a ‘man of integrity’:

Robespierre was a man of integrity, and a good reputation is requisite for captivating the crowd. He was without pity, which ruins those who have it in revolutions. [...] But he was of the worst species of men. A devotee without passions, without the vices to which they lead, but yet without the courage, the greatness and the sensibility, which usually accompany them – a devotee living only by his pride and his creed, hiding himself in the day of danger, coming forth to claim adoration after the victory won by others – is one of the most odious beings that ever ruled over men, and, one would say the very vilest, if he had not possessed a strong conviction and acknowledged integrity.⁹⁰

Carlyle is specifically concerned with the ethical dimension of Thiers’s history. He is considering the moral responsibility of the historian and criticising Thiers’s apparently complete disregard of it:

By the way, has not M. Thiers a most wonderful system of Ethics *in petto* [undisclosed]? He will prove to you that the power to have done a thing almost (if not altogether) gave you the right to do it: every hero of his turns out to be perfectly justified in doing whatsoever—he has succeeded in doing. This seemed to me notable; with much else in Thiers; his affected touches of the Tacitus kind; his hard, mechanical, all-for-politics disposition: characteristic, I imagine, of the modern French school generally. That morality of his especially leads far if you inquire into it.⁹¹

In contrast to his later famous motto that ‘might is right’, here Carlyle strongly opposes Thiers’s bluntly utilitarian vision of history from a moral standpoint. Carlyle’s cynical comment on Thiers’s morality in the last sentence is also a reference to a larger current in French post-revolutionary historiography, which Carlyle sees, from a conservative moral standpoint, as lacking in moral insight.⁹²

We find Carlyle’s reaction to Thiers’s portrayal of Robespierre as a ‘villain’ and amoral man who is yet, paradoxically, also an example of moral (revolutionary) behaviour, in his letter to John Sterling commenting upon the review of *The French Revolution* written by Herman Merivale (1806–1874), and published in *The Edinburgh*

⁹⁰ Marie Joseph L. Adolphe Thiers, *The History of the French Revolution*, vol. 3, tr. by Frederick Shoberl (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), p. 476.

⁹¹ *CL* 6:300-305.

⁹² Compare the Blackwood’s depiction of Thiers in ‘Thiers’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 43 (1838), 311-30.

Review in July 1840 (it is noteworthy that it took *The Edinburgh Review* three years to find a language to answer Carlyle's work):

My Reviewer, of whom you spoke, is not Macaulay, as was at first told me, but one Merivale [...] He is a slightly impertinent man, with good Furnival's Inn faculty, with several Dictionaries and other succedanea about him,—small knowledge of God's Universe as yet, and small hope now of getting much. Three things struck me somewhat: first, the man's notion of Dumouriez' Campaign,—*platitude absolue* [absolute platitudes]: second, the idea that Robespierre had a religion in that Etre Supreme of his,—O Heaven, what then is Cant?—third, that the end of liberal government was not to remedy 'Hunger' but to keep down the complaint of it; pigs must die, but their squealing shall be suppressed! *Aus dem wird Nichts* [From this nothing will come]. There is no heart of understanding in an intellect that can believe such things; a heart paralytic, dead as a pound of logwood! I was heartily glad to hear this heart was not Macaulay's; of whom I have still considerable hopes.⁹³

Carlyle begins his polemics by largely repeating his sarcastic stance on Macaulay as a 'spiritual hippopotamus', and calling Merivale's reading of his text '*platitude absolue*' (a joke at Merivale's apparent lack of interest in any absolute values) with the reasoning capacity of a guest at the Furnival's Inn, the seat of the meetings of the London Corresponding Society known, in the words of the radical leader John Binns, as 'the very general resort of the most radical Jacobinical politics in London'.⁹⁴ Via his cynical comment on Merivale's review: 'pigs must die, but their squealing shall be suppressed!' Carlyle rather distinctly inhabits the radical language of Thomas Spence's *Pig's Meat*, born out of protest against Burke's anti-democratic vocabulary in the *Reflections*. This nuanced stance, deeply conservative and yet drawing from the radical grammar, forms the gist of Carlyle's eloquent answer.

Let us have a look at the depiction of Robespierre's religion in Merivale's review of *The French Revolution*, which Carlyle refers to in his letter:

The proclamation of its creed – the 'Fete de l'Etre Supreme,' was, says Mr Carlyle, the 'shabbiest page in human annals,' So it might well be described by one who considered merely its accessories – the skyblue silk coat of the poor pontiff Maximilian, and the pastboard goddess who came

⁹³ CL 12: 262-265.

⁹⁴ Cf. Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 66 and footnote on p. 167.

forth, a little singed, from the conflagration of Vice and Atheism. But with all its absurdity, it was an act of faith notwithstanding.’⁹⁵

Merivale’s staunch adherence to the *Edinburgh Review*’s creed that all morality and ethics are culturally and historically bound is revealed here. In his answer to *The French Revolution*, Merivale finds it necessary to present his own ethical stance, which rejects any notion of universal values, in considerable detail. He presents all morality in relativist terms, as no more than culturally agreed forms of conduct, which are normative only in relation to a given time and community. Such a culturally-bound stance on morality, according to Merivale, precludes any absolute judgments:

It should, perhaps, rather be said, that all formulas are in themselves realities, so long as men consent to abide by them. It is surely a very poor philosophy which disregards the power of forms on human character, and fancies that the greatest exercise of manly free will and independence consists in dashing them aside. [...] Nay, what appear to us, from long habit, fundamental, notions of right and wrong, frequently rest, as far as the multitude is concerned, on forms only; whatever philosophy may conjecture as to their principles.⁹⁶

In accordance with his creed, Merivale glorifies Robespierre’s ethics as the epitome of good moral standards, according to the utilitarian rule that the end justifies the means, and accuses Carlyle of not hero-worshipping him as he deserves:

Robespierre was a moral man – a strict observer of the ordinary homespun formulas of honesty, and decency which custom has framed for mankind. [...] La grande morale is that which subordinates means to end, and consequently has abundance of admirers in times of eagerness and violence.⁹⁷

Next to this utilitarian moral code, we have Merivale’s presentation of Robespierre as a ‘sincere’ man, because he never hid or denied his faith in his ideology, which, in itself, has rightly been regarded as irrational and ‘odious’, according to Merivale. Robespierre’s irrational faith in his self-made political religion is here seen as a heroic act of honesty and good political and moral standards. Merivale’s admiration for absolute rulers and tyrants can be gauged from this depiction, which sees Mirabeau and Danton as minor political figures, due to their lack of faith in Robespierre’s political ideology:

⁹⁵ Herman Merivale, ‘The French Revolution. A History. By Thomas Carlyle’, *The Edinburgh Review*, 71:144 (1840), 411-45 (pp. 428-29).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

That Robespierre was sincere in his way it is impossible to doubt; the cant of the school to which he belonged is odious to the educated mind; but so is that of Cromwell, which was still more powerful in its way; and it was in this sense of reality that Robespierre stood so far above the *mere* infidel leaders of his time. [...] Mirabeau believed in nothing at all; the idols of Danton's worship were merely the ordinary political abstractions of the day: Robespierre's was a religion.

Merivale's sublime presentation of Robespierre is steeped in the language of the sublime, which became quite popular after 1830, in the new-gained Whig reading of Robespierre as a national martyr to the cause of the Revolution.⁹⁸ Robespierre's heroism, Merivale claims, consisted in

the reality of his own mission, in the greatness of the objects which he conceived himself called to accomplish, in the heroism of self-sacrifice, in the prevailing and final victory of virtue.⁹⁹

Merivale's language reflects *The Edinburgh Review's* position in the wake of the July Revolution of 1830, which radically changed the perception of the Revolution of 1789 and allowed the Whigs to posit a re-interpretation of the revolutionary events in a much more positive light. The general line of *The Edinburgh Review* in 1830s was a reading of the Revolution as a necessary event in human civilisational progress. By contrast, in earlier reviews from the beginning of the century, *The Edinburgh Review* takes a considerably less decided line of argumentation by lamenting the fact that the 1789 Revolution had swerved off its initial moderate course and the historically-outdated layer of religious and political 'superstitions' had not been removed in a more 'gentle' and altogether more 'enlightened' manner by the revolutionary leaders:

Upon a review of the whole matter, it seems impossible to acquit those of the revolutionary patriots, whose intentions are admitted to be pure, of great precipitation, presumption, and imprudence. Apologies may be found for them, perhaps, in the inexperience which was incident to their situation; in their constant apprehension of being separated before their task was accomplished [...] while we pity their sufferings, and admire their genius, we cannot feel any respect for their wisdom, or any surprise at their miscarriage.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Cf. Hedva Ben-Israel, 'Studies of Robespierre', in *English Historians on the French Revolution*, pp. 165-174.

⁹⁹ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 432.

¹⁰⁰ Francis Jeffrey, 'Memoirs d'un Témoin de la Révolution. Ouvrage Posthume de Jean Sylvain Bailly', in *Selections from Edinburgh Review*, vol. 4 (London: Longman, 1833), p. 590.

Gradually, however, *The Edinburgh Review* begins to see the Revolution as a necessary historical event and its leaders as acting outside any point of moral reference, while carrying out the work of the supposedly (historically) necessary destruction of the old and corrupt political system.¹⁰¹ Burke's depiction of the revolutionaries as cold-blooded murderers and destroyers of their country was accurate, it is claimed according to this new interpretation. However, their proceedings must not be judged by any moral criteria, because they were sanctioned by the strict laws of 'historical progress'. The utter incompetence and lack of any moral inhibitions or political reflection are here seen as beneficent to the cause of destruction of the old system. '[H]ighest political wisdom' could not have produced the outcome which the revolutionaries' incompetence did. The immorality and bestiality of the revolutionaries is their chief merit in this utilitarian reading. Macaulay comments in *The Edinburgh Review*:

The glory of the National Assembly is this, that they were in truth, what Mr. Burke called them in austere irony, the ablest architects of ruin that ever the world saw. They were utterly incompetent to perform any work which required a discriminating eye and a skilful hand. But the work which was then to be done was a work of devastation. They had to deal with abuses so horrible and so deeply rooted, that the highest political wisdom could scarcely have produced greater good to mankind than was produced by their fierce and senseless temerity.¹⁰²

In place of ethical language, Macaulay uses the Whig aesthetic grammar for the description of the Revolution as 'vulgar' and 'inglorious', something that respectable statesmen would be ashamed to take part in, because of its aesthetically displeasing connotations, but which they implicitly should be happy to delegate to the 'vulgar' French:

Demolition is undoubtedly a vulgar task; the highest glory of the statesman is to construct. But there is a time for every thing, - a time to set up, and a time to pull down. The talents of revolutionary leaders, and those of the legislator, have equally their use and their season. It is the natural, the almost universal law, that the age of insurrections and proscriptions shall precede the age of good government, of temperate liberty and liberal order.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Cf. 'Milton', in *Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay, Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review*, 5th ed. in 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), 1-62.

¹⁰² Macaulay, 'Souvenirs sur Mirabeau, et sur les deux Premieres Assemblees Legislatives', *The Edinburgh Review*, 55:110 (1832), 552-576 (559).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

The most surprising trait of Carlyle's *French Revolution*, which made it difficult for his reviewers to 'locate' him politically, is his challenge to both the Tory and Whig versions of history. This debate will be the focus of the following chapter.

Herman Merivale's answer to *The French Revolution* published in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1840, which we already began to examine in the previous chapter is an important and so far hardly examined contemporary voice in the debate on *The French Revolution*. Merivale (1806–1874), an English civil servant, historian and economist reviews Carlyle's work from a distinctly Whig historical and economical stance. Merivale's main critique of *The French Revolution* is that he does not see Carlyle as falling under the category of a (Whig) historian, while, at the same time, he has difficulty in providing any generic classification for Carlyle's work. Although Merivale is explicitly impressed by Carlyle's 'sometimes original and always independent' style,¹ he nonetheless dismisses it as 'inappropriate' for historical writing. Carlyle's originality seems to be both the main flaw of his text, according to Merivale, and, at the same time, its chief merit, which allows the reader to engage more actively with the text than a traditional historical narrative:

His brief outlines first arrest the attention, and then provoke objection: we feel tempted to debate and argue every point with him, proposition by proposition; but it is wonderful on how much more cordial terms we part with a companion of this description – angered though we may have felt at times by mutual contradiction – than with one of those formal and useful guides who fall under the general denomination of historian – to which, in plain truth, Mr Carlyle has no title whatever.²

Merivale, we could say, following our previous examination of the conclusion of *The French Revolution*, is an author who, looking for a quick and smooth solution to the complex debate staged by Carlyle, misunderstands Carlyle's challenge to the Whig historical idiom and translates it back into his Whig perspective. Merivale's farewell with Carlyle on 'cordial terms', suggests that he has missed Carlyle's Swiftian satire altogether and has lightly discarded its moral lessons. Despite 'having been angered' by some of Carlyle's passages, Merivale suggests that they do not deserve a proper critical answer, since, according to him, *The French Revolution* is only a rather curious but failed experimental text which must not be treated seriously. In the *Edinburgh Review*'s patronising tone which so irritated Carlyle that he dedicated three letters to vent his

¹ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 412.

² *Ibid.*, p. 416.

anger,³ Merivale pays Carlyle a doubtful compliment for being, if not a historian, then at least a good *artist*: ‘Mr Carlyle, therefore, assuredly deserves some honour as an artist, if not as a faithful interpreter of the past, for having contrived to make something of such unpromising materials.’⁴ Merivale’s Whig dismissal of the French Revolution as a valid theme for a large historical study, as well as his desire to discredit Carlyle as a historian, are arguably revealed here. Ultimately, Merivale believes, Carlyle is neither a good historian, nor an artist, but rather a common journalist, who acquired his style and method through his writing in the periodical press: ‘he writes for the delusory readers and thinkers of the day; and has served his apprenticeship, and acquired his particularities, in the school of journal and essay writing.’⁵ Merivale suggests that Carlyle’s history is too implicated in ‘common’, ‘journalistic’ genres and themes, which have no place in the ‘respectable’ sphere of history, to be taken seriously.

Yet, if we were to take Merivale’s comment seriously, it is possible that Carlyle is aiming precisely and deliberately for a ‘journalistic’, open and press-mediated discussion of the contemporary signs of the times, rather than for a formal historical discourse which Merivale denies him.⁶ As we shall see, in Carlyle’s construction of history as a ‘free Emporium’, a space of free dialogue between all people (given that ‘all men are historians’⁷), the periodical press is a welcome guest, for which Carlyle holds a similar mixture of contempt and fascination as he does for the French crowd. Ian Duncan has noticed that the metaphysical German masquerade which Carlyle stages in *Sartor* is inspired directly by *Blackwood’s* publications.⁸ If we apply this perspective to *The French Revolution*, we can see it as simultaneously rejoicing in its democratic multi-voiced narrative (channelled through the periodical press) and (in *Blackwood’s* style) as challenging the Whig myth of progress. The periodical press is both the addressee of Carlyle’s interest and the object his critique. In chapter entitled ‘Journalism’ in the second volume of *The French Revolution* Carlyle expresses his mixed feelings about periodical press, channelling his views on democracy as both a liberating and suspect political tongue:

³ Cf. Seigel, p. 12.

⁴ Merivale, ‘The French Revolution. A History’, p. 418.

⁵ Merivale, ‘The French Revolution. A History’, p. 412.

⁶ G. B. Tennyson, for example, in *Sartor Called Resartus* has suggested that Carlyle’s engagement with *Blackwood’s Magazine* should be examined more closely. Cf. Tennyson, p. 134-5.

⁷ *CME* 2:171.

⁸ Duncan, p. 308.

One Sansculottic bough that cannot fail to flourish is Journalism. The voice of the People being the voice of God, shall not such divine voice make itself heard? To the ends of France; and in as many dialects as when the first great Babel was to be built! Some loud as the lion; some small as the sucking dove. Mirabeau himself has his instructive Journal or Journals, with Geneva hodmen working in them; and withal has quarrels enough with Dame le Jay, his Female Bookseller, so ultra-compliant otherwise.⁹

In Merivale's Whig agenda of culturally-modelled, flexible morality which changes according to socio-political circumstances, Carlyle's Calvinism is not only an 'ancient dialect', but also cannot be seen in any other light than as an expression of moral fatalism. Instead of hero-worshipping Robespierre's superior civilisational model, as Merivale does, Carlyle applies to his character a supposedly anachronistic (Christian) moral standard. It is this crucial misunderstanding of Carlyle's Calvinist perspective, which leads Merivale to assign to Carlyle a 'fatalist' reading of the Revolution, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, it was Carlyle's explicit aim to challenge with the concepts of free will and conscience:

It would perhaps not be very difficult to show how this mode of viewing historical reality, as to individual men, is connected with that sort of indulgent fatalism which we have mentioned as the characteristic of the moral views of Mr Carlyle. Men are treated as agents who had a part to perform — a work to do — until we almost cease for a time to regard them as any thing else.¹⁰

Overall, Merivale is puzzled by *The French Revolution* and does not know what to make of the text and its author (the mere fact that *The Edinburgh Review* does not publish a full-length review of *The French Revolution* until 1840 can be read as an expression of this confusion). Merivale is specifically anxious to pinpoint Carlyle's political credentials, something that proves highly problematic. Carlyle clearly does not speak the Whig language with which Merivale is acquainted, but Merivale also faces

⁹ FR 2:27. Compare: 'The itch for writing and publishing never, as I presume, existed to such an extent in any country. There are, as I am credibly informed, about eight or ten thousand persons in Germany who derive their livelihood entirely, or the greater part of it, from feribbling, or, as they call it, *enlightening the public mind*. Almanacks, Journals, Reviews, Magazines, Collections, Romances, Essays, Pamphlets of all sizes and on all subjects, Newspapers, &c. increase beyond all bounds. It is not uncommon, I find, to see some hundreds of romances published in the space of half a year. The winter half year is the most prolific; during which period they are in general completely occupied in their study from an early hour in the morning to a late hour at night with scarcely the smallest intermission. A visit of half an hour would totally derange them, and they are thus very seldom to be seen, except in the summer months, when such as are somewhat more at ease than the rest, take a little recreation. 'The Literati and Literature of Germany', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 5, 22 (1800), 568-580 (p. 573).

¹⁰ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 420.

difficulties in locating him within the Tory discourse. For Merivale, both the style of *The French Revolution*, its politics and its generic complexity render it an altogether foreign language in Britain, which he personally does not understand and to which he does not know how to respond. Carlyle's supposed 'self-education', as Merivale imagines, and lack of 'British discipline', have turned him into a curious Germanic-transcendental (but, perhaps most importantly, *Scottish*) misfit on British soil (transcendentalism being the bogeyman of the non-metaphysical, utilitarian philosophy of *The Edinburgh Review*). It is Carlyle's supposedly non-British metaphysics (read, Carlyle's mixture of Germanism and Calvinism) that specifically disturb Merivale and make him depict Carlyle as a man who arrived in Britain from a 'foreign land', falling from his 'own metaphysical cloud-land to our matter-of-fact atmosphere':

Self-educated, we believe, and nurtured on the very quintessence of German transcendentalism, with little ordinary British discipline to counteract it, he could only clothe his own thoughts in the same uncouth foreign livery in which the parent thoughts had been clothed when first his mind received and appropriated them. He seemed a solitary or rare example of one who, in his native country, had unlearned his native language; and was as much a stranger among us as Jean Paul or Ludwig Tieck might have been, if suddenly transferred from their own metaphysical cloud-land to our matter-of-fact atmosphere.¹¹

Both Carlyle's Romanticism and his Calvinist mindset are here depicted as expressions of his insubordination to the British (Whig) stylistic and philosophical discipline, which apparently excludes him from a rational dialogue. Not only is Carlyle's 'undisciplined' and flamboyant style a foreign body in Britain, transferred from another land and time, his metaphysical imagination, in Merivale's depiction, produces illegitimate linguistic monsters (a 'bastard English'), which are quite simply unacceptable to Merivale's taste:

For our own part, our dislike of his bastard English is unconquered and unconquerable; and this, together with the endless scraps of Schiller, and Goethe, and Richter, which are interwoven (without the trouble of any thing deserving the name of translation) in his composition.¹²

Of course, Carlyle's aim (rooted in his Christian outlook) is precisely to transcend and challenge the British cultural perspective by introducing German and French vocabulary into his text, something that from the point of view of Merivale's 'British discipline' is quite unacceptable and aesthetically offensive. Aside from the fact that Merivale will

¹¹ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 411.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 412.

have nothing to do with Carlyle's 'transcendentalism', he nonetheless recognises that Carlyle's discussion of the Revolution does substantially transcend the current narratives and adds an altogether new and (for Merivale) inexplicable value to history-writing.

In Merivale's own culturally-specific and progressivist moral agenda there is no possible point of reference for criticising Robespierre's reign of terror. Merivale's own hero-worshipping sketches of absolute rulers in his *Historical Studies* (1865) are characteristic of his political sympathy for absolute power. Indeed, in his review, he criticises Carlyle for not acknowledging Robespierre's success and his new political cult:

Robespierre had another great source of strength (and here it appears to us that Mr Carlyle has most misconceived his character,) as being, throughout, the very apostle and prolocutor, for the populace, of that vague and indefinite religion which Rousseau had created, and which then enjoyed so immense a popularity—a religion of sentiment without belief.¹³

The crux of Merivale's misunderstanding of Carlyle can be glimpsed here. Whereas Carlyle sees Christian moral perspective as an active and critically-valid voice in the discussion of the Revolution, Merivale's Whig's perception undercuts this voice to the level of a cultural and aesthetic expression, apparently rendering Carlyle's voice obsolete. All that the historian is able to claim of Robespierre is that he had a large popular following and that he was a successful ruler for a period of time (compare Merivale's similar depiction of Catherine the Great and other absolute rulers in his *Historical Studies*).

According to Merivale, Carlyle speaks a 'barbarian' (political, moral *and* aesthetic) language from outside the scope of the intelligible parlance, which is dangerous because it has already, according to Merivale, become infectious among other contemporary writers:

Clever young writers delight in affecting his tone of quaint irony, and indulgent superiority; and many a scribe, whose thoughts have about as much originality as the almanac for the year, fancies that he gives them an air of novelty and impressiveness by clothing them in a barbarous garb,

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

for the fashion of which their prototype must hold himself to a certain extent responsible.¹⁴

The depiction of Carlyle's style as 'barbarian' is repeated on a couple of occasions by Merivale to justify his dislike of Carlyle's prose. Carlyle writes with 'barbarian eloquence of language' that is supposedly dangerously alluring if not unmasked and rejected:

[O]ur dislike to his bastard English is unconquered [...] notwithstanding all the interest of detached scenes, and the vigour of thought and barbarian eloquence of language which often characterise the accompanying reflections.¹⁵

However, as already noted, Merivale's depiction of Carlyle's style as 'barbarous' seems to cryptically refer to Carlyle's Scottish (Calvinist) mentality, which Merivale rejects as 'uncivilized tongue' that is not suited to enter into the realm of rational dialogue. Writing about *Sartor*, Ian Duncan notices that Carlyle's deliberate alienation of language through the medium of German is an essentially Scottish trait of his writing (something that, as we already saw, was also suggested in the early review of *The French Revolution* in *Fraser's Magazine*¹⁶):

Maginn's catchphrase for Carlylean style, 'Allgemeine-Midlothianish of Auld Reekie,' brilliantly renders its character as a mode of translation, a Scottish writing that alienates English through the mock-philological 'deep' medium of a Northern linguistic analogue, German, standing in a metaphoric relation to English-rather than through those metonymically proximate forms of vernacular Scots that have arguably, thanks to Burns and Scott, become a homely dialect to all nineteenth-century British readers.¹⁷

In a similar way *The French Revolution* can arguably be seen to channel via German metaphysics Carlyle's Scottish Calvinism, an alien and (culturally) foreign presence from Merivale's English-focused perspective. This connection between Carlyle's 'savage' style and his Scottish origin and manner of writing is confirmed later in the century in *The Examiner* in an article entitled 'London Scotchmen', where an

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁶ 'Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution*', in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (1837), 85-104 (p. 104).

¹⁷ Duncan, p. 309.

anonymous reviewer describes Carlyle's style as the 'equine savagery of Mr. Carlyle, of whom, more than of any other living Scotchman, his countrymen are proud.'¹⁸

In order to demonstrate the 'foreignness' of Carlyle's thought, Merivale gives a summary of the current narratives of the Revolution up to the publication of Carlyle's work. He begins with the conservative reading, which dominated in the discussion of the Revolution in Britain more or less until the July Revolution of 1830 (when *The Edinburgh Review* changed the tone):

Resistance to established authority is a crime—interfering with our neighbour's property a crime—taking his life a crime. Consequently, the whole French Revolution was a great crime; all who engaged in it were criminals— [...] But that which points the moral of his narrative, and gives at the same time the zest to his labours, is the tracing out the action of the presiding Nemesis of that great drama;—the retribution, national and private, which visited each separate sin on the people at large, and which followed each individual actor into the very recesses of his own home or heart. This is what may be called the orthodox method of writing the history of the French Revolution; it was once exclusively popular in England, and is still not without followers.¹⁹

We can recognise here some of the conservative readings of *The French Revolution*, initiated by Froude, which we already examined in previous chapters, as well as Merivale's own reading of the moral 'fatalism' of *The French Revolution*. The most outspoken propagator of this interpretation was *The Anti-Jacobin Review*. It was *The Anti-Jacobin* specifically that presented Germany and specifically German universities as the hot-bed of French revolutionary ideas (through the construction of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant as 'dangerous', because it was seen as the continuator of the revolutionary thought in France²⁰):

¹⁸ 'London Scotchmen', *Examiner* (1880), p. 1183.

¹⁹ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 413.

²⁰ Kant's interest in the French Revolution combined 'the radical's attitude toward revolution and the conservative's

attitude toward maintaining the existing legitimate government', Sidney Axinn, 'Kant, Authority, and the French Revolution', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32:3 (1971), 423-432. Compare also, for example: 'What I have often remarked among the *Kantists* in Germany, I have not unfrequently observed among the partizans of German literature whether Frenchmen or Englishmen. If Kant has really made so many celebrated and important discoveries, as it is maintained he has, it must surely be very easy, by a short and simple exposition of them, to prevent all farther doubts on the subject and to establish the credit of the German Aristotle on the firmest basis. [...] The philosophy of Kant is the most valuable production of human genius – why? Because his partizans *assert* it; because they, who are not in the secret, cannot *comprehend* it; and because his *enlightened* followers confidently assure us that its merits will one day be fully perceived and universally acknowledged.' 'The Literati and Literature of Germany', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 5:22 (1800), 568-580 (p. 569).

Ninety-nine in every hundred of literary men in Germany, or of men who assume that appellation, either are, or have been, professors in the different Universities. Electrified, at first, by French principles, afterwards tempted by the success which many writers had obtained, either in the revolution, or by means of it, they espoused all its extravagant doctrines, and propagate them, with the zeal of converts, and the fury of bigots. [...] In some of the Universities not a single professor is to be found who dares admit the existence of God.²¹

The Anti-Jacobin also developed Burke's imagery of the French Revolution as an attack of barbarians on the civilised world:

[T]his modern scourge of nations extends its destructive influence much wider than the barbarians of ancient times. They only checked the progress of the human mind, they did not poison it, by the infection of mad theories, they did not pervert all the principles which it had imbibed.²²

Also Merivale's self-complacent Britishness reflects the *Anti-Jacobin* attitude to foreign cultures and literatures, among which the French and Germans are seen as the most pertinent examples of dangerous 'cosmopolitism':

Having had the happiness to be born a British subject, I am not ashamed to own that I profess the liberal prejudices of my nation; and that I detest, from the bottom of my heart, that vile affected moderation, philanthropy, and cosmopolitism, &c. under the shadow of which so many of our countrymen, unworthy of the name of Britons, endeavour, by the most unworthy arts and insinuations, to tarnish the national character.²³

In this context, Merivale's depiction of Carlyle as speaking a 'barbarian' language should be read as his entering the *Anti-Jacobin* rhetoric, and can be seen as a political comment on Carlyle's sympathy with the revolutionary cause, expressed via his presentation of the revolutionaries in the language of the sublime, which goes against Merivale's Whig programme:

[Carlyle] seems to believe in the power of government to raise the poorer class altogether out of its present position by legislation. [...] The every day utility of free institutions is, not that they guarantee the toiler against hunger—would that it were otherwise!—but that they create a vast and powerful class interested in the maintenance of order; and infuse into that class a spirit and intelligence which render it adequate to the task. They cannot ensure the labourer against want; but they give scope to his

²¹ 'Summary of Politics, foreign and Domestic', *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 1:6 (1798), 728-729 (p. 427).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 725.

²³ *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 5:22 (1800), p. 570.

energy, if he has any; they cannot heal the evils of the competitors [*sic*] fair play.²⁴

Carlyle cynically paraphrases Merivale in a letter to Sterling: ‘the end of liberal government [is] not to remedy ‘Hunger’ but to keep down the complaint of it; pigs *must* die, but their squealing shall be suppressed! *Aus dem wird nichts* [Out of him comes nothing].’²⁵ Carlyle reads Merivale’s depiction of the revolutionaries as a case of joining the ultra-conservative language propagated by *The Anti-Jacobin*. This ultra-conservative and anti-revolutionary political imagery was already the addressee of Carlyle’s earlier work, *Sartor Resartus*. *Sartor*, as Ian Duncan aptly notices, can be seen as staging a misreading of the German Professor by a conservative British Editor. Satirising the Editor’s fears that German metaphysics may poison Britain with perilous revolutionary ideas, Carlyle suggests that this is precisely what happens after the book of the metaphysical Professor of Things in General arrives in London. The final joke is that the Editor’s fears become a self-fulfilling prophecy and the transcendental philosophy of *Sartor* (Latin, ‘a tailor’), after being read by the working population of London, produces an uprising of ‘tailors’, which the Professor eagerly joins:²⁶

It had been remarked that while the agitating news of those Parisian Three Days flew from mouth to month, [...] Herr Teufelsdröckh was not known, at the *Gans* or elsewhere, to have spoken, for a whole week, any syllable except once these three: *Es geht an* (It is beginning). Shortly after [...] was the public tranquillity here, as in Berlin, threatened by a Sedition of the Tailors. Nor did there want Evil-wishers, or perhaps mere desperate

²⁴ Merivale, ‘The French Revolution. A History’, p. 417.

²⁵ *CL* 12: 262-265.

²⁶ Carlyle’s joke appears also to be based on a true story of an uprising of tailors which occurred in 1805 after the staging of the play, *The Tailors: A Tragedy for Warm Weather*. At ‘the little theatre in the Haymarket’ there occurred, in 1805, one of the most curious riots in theatrical annals. In 1767 Foote had produced a burlesque, the author of which has never been discovered, entitled *The Tailors: A Tragedy for Warm Weather*. Downton announced the revival of the piece for his benefit. As the title implies, it was a satire upon the sartorial craft, and upon the bills being issued, an indignation meeting was convened among the knights of the needle, who vowed to oppose the performance by might and main. Menacing letters were sent to Downton, telling him that seventeen thousand tailors would attend to hiss the piece, and one who signed himself ‘DEATH’ added that ten thousand more could be found if necessary. These threats were laughed at by the actors; but when night came, it was discovered that the craft were in earnest, and that, with few exceptions, they had contrived to secure every seat in the house, while a mob without still squeezed for admission. The moment Downton appeared upon the stage, there arose a hideous uproar, and someone threw a pair of shears at him. Not a word would the rioters listen to, nor would they accept any compromise in the way of changing the piece. Within howled and hissed without intermission hundreds of exasperated tailors; outside howled and bellowed thousands of raging members of the craft, who attempted to storm the house. So formidable did the riot become that a magistrate had to be sent for and special constables called out; but these were helpless against the overwhelming odds; so that a troop of Life Guards was summoned, who made sixteen prisoners and put the rest to flight.’ *The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilisation*, vol. 15., ed. by Alfred Bates (London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906), pp. 101-102.

Alarmists, who asserted that the closing Chapter of the Clothes-Volume was to blame.²⁷

The satirical construction of the German Philosopher in *Sartor* echoes *The Anti-Jacobin*'s language and imagery to the minutest detail. Teufelsdröckh is depicted as a philosopher who supports the Jacobin cause, provocatively smokes and drinks German beer to 'The Cause of the Poor in Heaven's name and Devil's'²⁸ and who perceives the crowds of people below his tower as thronging bees rather than human beings.²⁹ Compare *The Anti-Jacobin*:

It would be abundantly ridiculous (if it were not more dangerous than risible) to observe these self-constituted reformers enveloped in their little rooms in fumes of tobacco, and surrounded with all the Jacobin prints and pamphlets of every nation in Europe, extracting their injurious poison with as much assiduity, and from as many different sources, as the Bee extracts her honey. [...] Their weak minds have been peculiarly flattered with the progress and success of the revolution. There are persons amongst them who approve of it in all its horrors [...].³⁰

Carlyle satirises *The Anti-Jacobin*'s agenda of a moral and political isolation from the continent (or literally 'cutting-off', hence the eponymous Tailor of the novel), in a self-righteous attitude which condemns all discussion of the European matters as dangerous *cosmopolitanism*.³¹ To young Carlyle, himself a foreigner in London, fascinated with Goethe's literary vision of Romantic world-literature and Mme de Staël's romantic journeys across Europe, *The Anti-Jacobin*'s position of cultural isolation is a fitting object of an extravagant and sophisticated literary joke. The metaphor of British culture as a 'sealed book', another leitmotif in *Sartor*, is similarly taken from *The Anti-Jacobin*'s agenda of political isolationism and cultural puritanism in the post-Revolutionary atmosphere.³² One of the instances of this attitude is a letter from a

²⁷ SR: 217.

²⁸ SR: 13.

²⁹ Carlyle can be seen here also to satirise Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees' (1705).

³⁰ 'The Literati and Literature of Germany', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 5:22 (1800), 568-580 (pp. 573-4).

³¹ 'To cherish an Anti-Gallican spirit has, in all times, been deemed an effort of genuine patriotism, a mark of that love for one's country, which distinguishes the true-born Englishman from the mongrel cosmopolite. That spirit, as it existed previous to the French revolution, did not consist in an uncharitable and unchristian-like hatred of our neighbours, in a dislike of their persons, or an antipathy to their laws and government, but in a well-founded jealousy of their power, and a just dread of contamination from the frivolity of their manners, and the relaxed state of their moral principles [...].' *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (London: J. Whittle, 1799), p. 107.

³² In the last chapter of *Sartor*, at the end of the enormous interpretative effort of the dumb Hudibras-like figure of the Editor, he claims that the German original text remains for him a 'sealed book': 'in the

‘Country Parish Priest’ printed in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, in which the author protests against any alterations made to the text of the Common Prayer Book, arguing that it must remain one of the ‘sealed books’ (the first one being, of course, the Bible, challenged by the contemporary readings of the Higher Criticism).³³ The image of national religion and culture as hermetically ‘sealed up texts’ expresses *The Anti-Jacobin*’s fear of foreign theological, political, cultural and intellectual infiltrations. Carlyle eagerly exploits and exposes this fear of an intercultural dialogue. Parting from the metaphor of a *sealed book*, Carlyle’s text will literally become so attentive to the foreign influences as to engraft them onto English language.³⁴ We will see this ideology of seclusion developed in the Whig programme of historiography later in this chapter. Suffice it to state here that the dialogical, experimental and inconclusive style of Carlyle’s work is a direct challenge both to *The Anti-Jacobin* and of Merivale’s Whig parlance.

The Anti-Jacobin’s cultural frigidity contrasts with the artistic imaginativeness and openness of *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Yet, despite its cosmopolitan cultural agenda, *Blackwood’s* remains uncritical in its coverage of the Revolution, dedicating a number of articles to the recantation of Alison’s conservative vision of the Revolution as a ‘triumph of atheism and anarchy.’³⁵ *Blackwood’s* also has no problem in embracing full-length the vision of the Revolution borrowed from Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) as a providential force, acting as a punishment for France’s moral laxity. In such a landscape, according to Alison (and *Blackwood’s*, quoting uncritically), Britain is to act as a God’s chosen prophet, announcing to France and to Europe: ‘The highest office of human experience is to guide human conduct; and the guidance of nations is the providential purpose of history.’³⁶ *Blackwood’s Magazine* repeats uncritically Alison’s self-righteous perception of Britain and his apocalyptic prophecies delivered in a biblical tongue. Accordingly, all discussion about France must be consciously resisted:

Wahngasse all lies swept, silent, sealed up; the Privy Council itself can hitherto elicit no answer.’ *SR*: 217.

³³ In an anonymous article in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, the author expresses his fear that the new Oxford editors of the Common Prayer Book may be acting ‘on the spirit of reform’: ‘The legal standard, for the authorised Editors of the Common Prayer, must be one of the ‘sealed books,’ (as Oxoniensis calls them) provided by the Act of Uniformity.’ ‘A Country Parish Priest.’ *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 1:6 (1798), p. 702.

³⁴ Carlyle is responsible for a number of neologisms which today form part of the English dictionary, the most famous of them being the word ‘environment’. Cf. Stephen Prickett, *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 175.

³⁵ ‘The French Revolution’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*; 33 (1833), 889-910 (p. 889).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

[W]e have resisted, and by the blessing of God will resist it still; and when the time shall come when authority will place itself on the side of law, grasp the ruffian orators of Jacobin clubs, movement leaders, agitators, and political unionists, and the whole brood of monstrous and mischevicious shapes which rabble ambition generates of the slime of rabble power; when we shall see the whole race of the missionaries of the lamp-iron sent to the dungeon, or to return-less exile, then shall we believe that the time of national redemption draweth nigh; but not till then.³⁷

Carlyle was familiar with this censorious attitude not only from domestic politics but also from his own home, where all discussion, at least in his later recollection, was resisted as 'idle tattle' by his 'tongueparalysing, cold, indifferent' father, who was 'never visited with Doubt.'³⁸ To some extent Carlyle's writing oscillates between what he sees as his father's dictatorial position and between a consciously sympathetic move to include and involve in an open discussion specifically all those voices which have been censured and suppressed. Although both in his earlier writings and in *The French Revolution* Carlyle is particularly sensible to this movement of exclusion and censorship, which he seeks to counter with an agenda of free and open dialogue, in his later writings, as we shall see, he becomes increasingly censorious and dictatorial in his attitudes.

Whereas the July Revolution in 1830 called for a re-reading of the events of 1789, *Blackwood's*, after 1830, remains essentially faithful to Alison's interpretation:

In both, the operation of the same law of nature may be discerned, for the expulsion of a destructive passion from the frame of society by the efforts which it makes for its own gratification. In both, the principal actors were driven forward by an unseen power, which rendered their vices and ambition the means of ultimately effecting the deliverance of mankind.³⁹

Not only does the July Revolution not essentially change the conservative reading of the first French Revolution, but, in the *Blackwood's* reading, it confirms the earlier reading, so that it is possible now to refer backward to the 'fulfilled prophecy' of the second Revolution:

Were we actuated by the malice of demons, we should feel a malignant satisfaction at the extraordinary proof which subsequent events have given to the very letter of the truth of all these principles. We do not

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 892.

³⁸ Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, pp. 5-6.

³⁹ 'The French Revolution', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 890.

pretend to the gift of prophecy, but only to the results of patient historical research. It is in the book of history that we looked for 'the shadows which coming events cast before,' and in the lessons of historic experience, that we have sought to portray the mirror of future events. The reformers have adopted the opposite course; they have rejected the 'old Almanack' with all its contents, and put to sea without either rudder or compass, in the midst of a tempestuous gale; and the nation is astonished that they are drifting upon the breakers!⁴⁰

In the 1830s the French Revolution becomes a warning which *Blackwood's* uses repeatedly against the reform movement.⁴¹ The fear of a dialogue and discussion is emphasised by the portrayal of the supporters of democratic change as insatiable monsters who follow their passions and are unable to reason because 'the passion for democratic power, like every other passion which agitates the human breast, is insatiable, and becomes more violent, the more it is indulged.'⁴² Open discussion supposedly only leads to a diffusion of error under present conditions:

Nothing is more erroneous than to imagine that public discussion, as now carried on in this country, leads to the present extraction of truth. It tends, on the contrary, more than any thing else, to the diffusion of error. Truth will indeed be in the end triumphant; but it will become so only on the cooling of passion, and the decay of interest. *It will not be found while the newspapers are seeking it.*⁴³

Blackwood's advances new prophecies of a bleak future and an upcoming revolution in Britain. The same historical pattern can supposedly be detected in all ages and all countries: reforms and discussions lead gradually but necessarily to bloody revolutions.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1830) (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1832), 103-116, p. 104.

⁴¹ *Blackwood's* presents large gatherings of people as acting out of irrational passions. The lesson to be taken from the Revolution in France is that democracy is not to be trusted: 'Large bodies of men, when assembled together, are always governed by their passions: the manufacturers, from being permanently put in close contact with each other, are everlastingly in the condition of a mob. Attachment to their superiors they have none; jealousy and animosity towards them they have in abundance.' 'On the French Revolution and Parliamentary Reform', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1831), 429-446 (p. 437).

⁴² 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1830), p. 104.

⁴³ 'On the French Revolution and Parliamentary Reform', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1831), p. 441.

⁴⁴ 'So uniformly has this profess been observed in all ages to attend the excitation o democratic ambition , and so clearly do we perceive its symptoms among ourselves, that the following diagnosis will furnish a picture of the disease, in all probability, to the ned of the world:- First symptoms-extravagant expectations of the benefit to be derived from reform; an universal passion for change in every department of life; a loosening of the bonds of religion, and general hatred at its ministers; general enthusiasm among the middling and lower orders; distrust and apprehension among the higher [...] Last symptoms- The rise of

After discussing the conservative model, Merivale quotes the reading espoused gradually by *The Edinburgh Review* and to which he himself essentially subscribes, despite his explicit protestations:

Another theory [...] was that which dealt wholly in abstractions—[...] until the moral character of separate acts and actors sank into insignificance. That final cause, in view of such writers, was the regeneration of France. [...] Given the proposition, that it was necessary the Revolution should succeed—and given also, that a September massacre, and a regicide, and a reign of terror, were necessary to its success; then a Danton, a Robespierre, and a Fouquier-Tinville were necessary parts of the machinery—like the wheels and cylinders of a cotton mill, by which the raw material must be crushed, and pulled, and divided, before the finished fabric can be produced. To quarrel with them as moral agents is therefore simply a loss of time—unphilosophical, absurd, and pedantic.⁴⁵

Here Merivale sums up the stance which holds that morality is relative, culturally-specific and non-rational. In the latter part of the review, which we already had a look at in the previous chapter, Merivale takes *The Edinburgh Review*'s position of historicism, which reduces moral agents to the role of unconscious (non-rational) followers of the cultural norms expressed in the times in which they happen to live, by arguing that Robespierre was a morally righteous man in following the changing cultural norms of the revolutionary times.

The French Revolution became the focus of *The Edinburgh Review*'s interest from the first issue in which Jeffrey's article initiated the discussion of the causes of the Revolution and the role played by the periodical publications and the philosophical writings in the spread of the revolutionary ideas.⁴⁶ Yet, it was not until after the second Revolution of 1830 that *The Edinburgh Review* developed its own version of the events

violent and arbitrary men, and the adoption of extreme revolutionary measures; proscriptions and massacres of the rich; confiscation of property, and general bankruptcy; hopeless agony, and depression among the poor [...] 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1830), pp. 107-9. Compare also: 'Let those whose reason is too refined to bear with our Gothic prejudices, fly to the shores of another continent, where they may have in abundance all physical accommodations, and all that they are pleased to consider as freedom, in the midst of uncut forests and untilled savannahs. - in a land a land where there are neither castles nor cathedrals, - among men that, puffed up with an ignorant and contemptible vanity, are contented to consider themselves as the aboriginal ... of a new land, rather than to glory in the recollection that they speak the language of England' Let us depart and let us bid God speed to their journey. But let us not be deceived into any participation of their paltry frenzy.' 'Observations on Madame de Stael's Posthumous Work', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1818), (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1818), 633-648 (p. 648).

⁴⁵ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 413.

⁴⁶ Ina Ferris, 'The Debut of The Edinburgh Review, 1802.' *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga [Accessed: 10/07/2016].

of 1789. In the Whig progressivist reading, the July Revolution points to the gradual progress of France from the barbarity of the first Revolution to the aesthetically more pleasing July Revolution of 1830. This is read in the Whig idiom as a civilisational progress, the third most perfect stage of which is the British ‘fully-civilised’ and bloodless Reform Act of 1832. In July, 1832 Macaulay in *The Edinburgh Review* contrasts British Reform with brutish continental violence and presents it as the paradigm and model for all past and future revolutions. Macaulay presents the ‘civilised’ and supposedly mild progress of the Reform Act, its brevity and efficiency as aesthetically and politically superior to the long and chaotic changes on the Continent. This superiority is apparently rooted in British culture, which is both rational, respectful of the law, and averse to all violence (the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, in which the authorities attacked a peacefully gathered crowd, is conveniently omitted from this narrative, as are the pro-reform riots in 1832):

As the second French Revolution has been far milder than the first, so that great change which has just been effected in England, has been milder even than the second French Revolution, - milder than any revolution recorded in history. Some orators have described the reform of the House of Commons as a revolution. [...] In the whole history of England, there is no prouder circumstance than this, - that a change which could not, in any other age, or in any other country, have been effected without physical violence, should here have been effected by the force of reason, and under the forms of law. The work of three civil wars has been accomplished by three sessions of Parliament [...] and not one sword has been drawn [...] During the fiercest excitement of the contest, - during the first fortnight of that immortal May, - there was not one moment at which any sanguinary act committed on the person of any of the most unpopular men in England, would not have filled the country with horror and indignation.⁴⁷

Ultimately then, although arguing from different principles, *The Edinburgh Review* is as conservative and self-assured in its moral superiority over France (channelled through the aesthetics of progress and non-violence) as is *Blackwood's*. The construction of British rationality and moral soundness contrasts sharply with the supposed brutality and irrationality of the continental revolutions. Not only the 1832 Reform Act but all English Revolutions are seen as immensely superior to the European revolts, since their only purpose was, supposedly, to *improve* and *correct* the corruption and abuses rather than to *destroy* the previous political system; while Britain's superior *common sense*, it

⁴⁷ Macaulay, ‘Souvenirs sur Mirabeau, et sur les deux Premières Assemblées Législatives’, in *The Miscellaneous Writings of Lord Macaulay*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1860), pp. 84-85.

is argued, always saved it from all pernicious utopian thought and foreign influence. Crucially, in the Whig construct, it is the superior aesthetic sensibility which leads the British nation directly onto the path of non-violent civilisational progress. In the wake of the Polish rebellions against the tsarist rule with the motto 'For our freedom and yours' and looking forward to the 1848 Spring of Nations, a Europe-wide democratic revolutionary movement that shook the old feudal basis of Europe, the Whig construction of an Englishman who never considers the liberty of anyone else except his own sounds not only anachronistic but also decidedly escapist:

The English Revolutions have therefore been undertaken for the purpose of defending, correcting, and restoring, -never for the mere purpose of destroying. Our countrymen have always, even in times of the greatest excitement, spoken reverently of the form of government under which they lived, and attacked only what they regarded as its corruptions. In the very act of innovating they have constantly appealed to ancient prescriptions; they have seldom looked abroad for models; they have seldom troubled themselves with Utopian theories; they have not been anxious to prove that liberty is a natural right of men; they have been content to regard it as the lawful birthright of Englishmen.⁴⁸

In *The Edinburgh Review's* self-complacent myth of 'Britishness' as secluded and uninterested in international politics, there is also no place for a religious voice of critique. Spirituality is seen as the political domain solely of those in power (rather than the totality of people) and is either a self-imposed delusion, or is consciously used to delude and control the naïve part of the nation:

In the history of human irrationality, two classes of impostors of very different characters present themselves to our notice, - those who wilfully deluded their species, and those who permitted their species to delude themselves.⁴⁹

This disregard of the supernatural is expressed in *The Edinburgh Review's* programme of a cultural translation of the greatest Christian works, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* into the language of pure political allegory,⁵⁰ something that

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 97.

⁴⁹ 'Lives of the Necromancers; or an Account of the most Eminent Person', *The Edinburgh Review* 60:121 (1834), p. 37.

⁵⁰ 'What should we think of a writer who should endeavour to prove that the great poems of Milton are merely allegorical - that Paradise Regained, for example, only typifies the establishment of the English commonwealth - that the leaders of the host of hell are no other than the captains and colonels whose deeds are registered in the Mercurius Aulicus, and their angelic rivals, the victors of Marston and Naseby?'. 'Rosetti on the Anti-Papal Spirit of the Italian Classics', *The Edinburgh Review* 60 (1834), 531-51 (p. 541).

Merivale himself attempts to perform on Carlyle's work. Whereas John Stuart Mill will attempt to temper and 'civilise' Carlyle's 'barbarian' Calvinism by presenting it in the language of poetry, Merivale's article can be seen as a failed attempt to read Carlyle through the lenses of the nineteenth-century Whig ideology.

Merivale, as we have seen, cannot locate Carlyle either in the Whig or Tory narration of the Revolution. He initially attempts a Whig reading of *The French Revolution* and immediately abandons it, declaring that it is impossible to pinpoint Carlyle's paradoxical and contradictory position. When inquiring into the causes of the Revolution, Merivale asserts that it is unreasonable for Carlyle to claim that the Revolution could have been caused *both* by the poverty of the people *and* by aristocratic laxity. In Merivale's account, Carlyle simply cannot have it both ways, he must choose one theory, and stick to it throughout his book if he wants to be taken seriously (of course, for Merivale, Carlyle is too artistically flippant to be taken seriously anyway, regardless of his political theories). And yet, as Merivale notices (somewhat self-contradictorily), there is a puzzling 'dramatic unity of purpose running through the whole', which he cannot quite pinpoint. The best example of Merivale's misreading of Carlyle's text comes in a footnote which he attaches to Carlyle's depiction of the Convention's voting over the king's life. In his favoured technique, which has been described by John Stuart Mill as 'looki[ng] more penetratingly into the deeper meaning of things [...] by means of real, not fictitious incidents',⁵¹ Carlyle creates a painting rich in symbolic meaning.⁵² Carlisle Moore in his study of the language of *The French Revolution* describes Carlyle's technique of adding a symbolic reading to the depicted scene through one (often final) sentence which transforms dramatically the whole depiction. With the last touch of the brush Carlyle suddenly adds a deeper significance or even changes altogether the meaning of the depicted scene:

He seems to [add] the tag as a kind of Parthian shot. Its appeal to him is probably best explained by its power to suggest the inexpressible. Deep mystical meanings might be adumbrated; wonder could be aroused by startling contrast; an effect of cosmic grandeur could be struck in only a few words. In the typical narrative paragraph, it had the virtue of

⁵¹ Mill, 'Carlyle's French Revolution', in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 20, XX, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 132-167 (p. 137).

⁵² Mill has depicted Carlyle's style as a picture drawing, and 'the Poetry of the French Revolution.' Mill, 'Carlyle's French Revolution', p. 137.

supplying a conclusion which was not conclusive, and of making an end that was also a beginning, rich in ironic suggestion and paradox.⁵³

Moore's depiction is in tune with Carlyle's original purpose to create a historical landscape capable of effecting an opening to the language of spiritual mystery (a 'barbarian' language, because largely forgotten in the nineteenth-century Britain).

Moore's insight into Carlyle's technique can be applied to the passage quoted by Merivale in his review. The last sentence of the depiction, without proposing an explanation of the passage, poses a paradox that is intended to raise the reader to a higher level of interpretation. Carlyle composes the scene in two contrasting paragraphs. In the first one, he manages to create tension and suspense by offering hardly any comment on the long procession of deputies who in a solemn manner cast their votes that will change the course of history. The swift enumeration of the voters builds the dramatic tension, since with each 'yes' the king's death is confirmed. The whole scene has the quality of a silent and mysterious ritual, in which each deputy ponders on his vote 'in his soul and conscience'. Robespierre's speech is mentioned but not quoted, which adds to the mysteriousness and gravity of the scene. No dialogue or second thought is allowed in the thick atmosphere which Carlyle creates as new votaries approach and the sentence of death echoes from one vote to another. Carlyle finishes the paragraph dramatically: 'Most spectral, pandemonial!'

The poor Girondins, many of them, under such fierce bellowing of Patriotism, say Death; justifying, motivant, that most miserable word of theirs by some brief casuistry and jesuitry. [...] Philippe Egalite votes in his soul and conscience, Death, at the sound of which, and of whom, even Patriotism shakes its head; and there runs a groan and shudder through this Hall of Doom. Robespierre's vote cannot be doubtful; his speech is long. Men see the figure of shrill Sieyes ascend; hardly pausing, passing merely, this figure says, 'La Mort sans phrase, Death without phrases;' and fares onward and downward. Most spectral, pandemonial!⁵⁴

This Burkean and 'sublime' description is juxtaposed with the second paragraph, in which we are given a carnivalesque and almost bawdy reflection and parody of the first one (this tragicomic effect, as we have already suggested, is the main technique in *The*

⁵³ Carlisle Moore, 'Carlyle's "Diamond Necklace" and Poetic History', *PMLA*, 58:2 (1943), 537-557 (p. 543). 'This kind of sentence comprises two distinct parts: first, a complete statement, simple or complex, not necessarily different from other sentences in the paragraph; and second, a shorter element, separated from the first by a comma (or semicolon) and dash, clausal or phrasal in form, which comes as a surprise either by revealing a deeper significance in the first element or by wholly changing its meaning.' *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *FR* 3:103.

French Revolution). The votes are cast as though ‘at a game of Rouge-et-Noir’, while the bored deputies amuse themselves with games, women, drinking and betting on the result of the voting, some falling asleep in their chairs between thinking about the vote and their dinners. The same pattern of gradual casting of votes is closely mirrored in this topsy-turvy reflection of the first paragraph with the echoing sentence of death, which however here appears to be confirmed onomatopoeically by ‘long Hahas’ rather than through a conscious decision. Carlyle finishes ironically: ‘Tout est optique,’ says Mercier, ‘the world is all an optical shadow.’

And yet if the Reader fancy it of a funereal, sorrowful or even grave character, he is far mistaken. ‘The Ushers in the Mountain quarter,’ says Mercier, ‘had become as Box-openers at the Opera;’ opening and shutting of Galleries for privileged persons, for ‘d’Orleans Egalite’s mistresses,’ or other high-dizened women of condition, rustling with laces and tricolor. Gallant Deputies pass and repass thitherward, treating them with ices, refreshments and small-talk [...] Further aloft reigns Mere Duchesse with her unrouged Amazons; she cannot be prevented making long Hahas, when the vote is not La Mort. In these Galleries there is refection, drinking of wine and brandy ‘as in open tavern, en pleine tabagie.’ [...] Members have fallen asleep; Ushers come and awaken them to vote: other Members calculate whether they shall not have time to run and dine. Figures rise, like phantoms, pale in the dusky lamp-light; utter from this Tribune, only one word: Death. ‘Tout est optique,’ says Mercier, ‘the world is all an optical shadow.’⁵⁵

Carlyle’s irony is apparently lost on Merivale, who inserts an explanatory footnote to Mercier’s comment. In a plain *Edinburgh Review* move, Merivale bluntly translates Carlyle’s imagery into a language of ‘scientific discourse’. Since from its first issue *The Edinburgh Review*⁵⁶ dedicated space to a scientific analysis of optical illusions, Merivale is in his element. The metaphor of visual delusions plays perfectly into Merivale’s idea of the relative character of morality which depends entirely upon one’s point of view. In what Carlyle would read as Hudibras’s interpretation of his philosophy (Carlyle borrows from Butler’s *Hudibras* (1663), one of his favourite works, a keen sense of the absurdity of human behaviour), Merivale explains to Carlyle in detail the intricacies of the optical deception:

What Mr Carlyle means by this we do not comprehend: what Mercier means is plain enough. Every thing visible, he says, is great or small, according to the point of view from which it is seen. He is remarking on

⁵⁵ *FR* 3:103.

⁵⁶ ‘ART. XXIII. The Elements of Optics’, *The Edinburgh Review*, 1:1 (1802), p. 158.

the singularly slight impression which extraordinary scenes produce on the observer's mind at the time, compared with the trace which they leave on the memory; - [...] This is among the striking remarks scattered here and there in the pages of that coarse and tasteless, but sometimes impressive writer.⁵⁷

Merivale's summary of Carlyle as a 'coarse and tasteless, but sometimes impressive writer' would make a good contribution, in Carlyle's burlesque style, to the Editor's naive reading of Teufelsdröckh's transcendental scripts in *Sartor*. In Carlyle's intention, of course, his symbolic language is far from *The Edinburgh Review's* simple allegory of perception, and, as any good symbol, develops itself in manifold directions and gives food for spiritual thought that transcends the letter of the text. On the moral level, Carlyle is in disagreement with the *Edinburgh Review's* style of moral relativism, but he is aware that humanity can and often does willingly put aside reason and conscience. There is a deep irrational dimension in humanity which is a real presence in the postlapsarian world, which Carlyle is keen to stress in his 'tragicomic' depiction, and which does not allow for Merivale's simplistic scientific explication and dismissal. Whereas, in Merivale's agenda, human experience has to be 'explained' via a historical theory of the writer's choice, *The French Revolution* demonstrates the insufficiency of all such theories. In accordance with this insight, in the thoughtless atmosphere of the second paragraph, rational thought gives way to carnivalesque absurdity, revealing what Hannah Arendt has termed 'the banality of evil'.⁵⁸ Similarly to Arendt and Zygmunt Bauman,⁵⁹ Carlyle believes that deep moral tensions, such as instanced by the French Revolution, cannot be solved scientifically, but must be read in the orthodox moral language of good and evil, and that the devil's acting in this world must be recognised as real. In Carlyle's concept of history, indebted to David Hume and the Scottish critique of causality, deep historical changes are seldom the outcome of a neat and tidy process of cause and effect, of logical thought and rational decisions. Political actors, Carlyle suggests, are seldom completely aware or care to consider all the influences and forces which drive them to take specific action, and often willingly renounce reason and replace it with irrationality.

⁵⁷ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 442.

⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963).

⁵⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, Leonidas Donskis, *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

Between these two descriptions, we see Carlyle's vision of humanity as ultimately poised between cruel and rigid systems of behaviour and a carnivalesque thoughtlessness on the other. On a deeper level still, 'tout est optique' reads like a variation on Medieval *vanitas vanitatum*, since all things in this world are ultimately perishable, and human life is seldom given due respect, be it a king's or a peasant's. 'Tout est optique' resembles one of the leading motifs of *The French Revolution*, the medieval *danse macabre* transformed into the carnivalesque revolutionary dance, *carmagnole*,⁶⁰ an image that is particularly in tune with Carlyle's Calvinist cynical perception of the worldly masquerade. All sublime customs and ideas in Carlyle's narrative have their Gothic or even carnivalesque and bathetic reflection. Through this collision of the sublime with the grotesque, the scene is specifically designed to awaken the readers' conscience and involve them in the ongoing moral and spiritual discussion by confronting them with some fundamental questions. Is reality really as unreadable and irrational as Mercier's comment suggests? Behind Carlyle's sublime awe at the revolutionary events, there is always a rather simple and commonsensical undertone. The world may often be too complicated for us to calculate all possible outcomes, Carlyle seems to be saying, and we may well have to stick to what our conscience tells us to do, whether it concerns kings or common people.

Read as the prefiguration of the scenes of terror to follow, the sudden moral apathy of the characters and carnivalesque misfit of this passage are inexplicable in *The Edinburgh Review*'s rigorously logical tongue without some reference to human spirituality. By contrast, in Carlyle's Christian perception, the scene becomes perfectly legible through the lens of human fallen nature (in a crucial sense, this is the fundamental insight around which Carlyle structures all his works, in challenge to the purely secularist, 'mechanical', perception of humanity, which does not perceive human person integrally as spirit, mind and body). Neither the first sublime passage, nor the second burlesque one explain the scene perfectly, while both provide valid and crucial poetical insights into reality.

⁶⁰ Compare Desaulniers's discussion of the Gothic symbolism of Carlyle's depiction of *carmagnole* as This Gothic use of a galvanized Catholicism is deployed most fully in Carlyle's presentation of the *Carmagnole* as demonic Eucharist. Launched by the revolutionary army, the *Carmagnole* tears down the culture of the Church and substitutes in its place the language of violence or the 'armed' word: 'One sees them drawn up in marketplaces; travel-plashed, rough-bearded, in *carmagnole complète*: the first exploit is to prostrate what Royal or Ecclesiastical monument, crucifix or the like, there may be; to plant a cannon at the steeple, fetch down the bell without climbing for it, bell and belfry together.' Desaulniers, p. 81.

It is significant that Carlyle at first attributes the review to Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859), in Carlyle's accolade, 'a spiritual hippopotamus', and his main rival in *The Edinburgh Review*⁶¹ whose 'History' (1828) in *The Edinburgh Review* was followed by Carlyle's 'Reflections on History' published in 1830 in *Fraser's Magazine* (a periodical magazine which made fun of Macaulay regularly). The contrast between the two visions of history and Carlyle's disagreement with the Whig agenda help define *The French Revolution*, at least partly, as an outcome of this argument.

What we see in Macaulay's essay is a project of basing history on more scrupulous scientific research than had been the case so far. Macaulay's choice of the ancient Greek historians for his study material is deliberate. In *The Anti-Jacobin* agenda, Greek philosophy and writings are suspect, because they are claimed to replace Christian religion with a purely philosophical outlook on life. The claim is rooted in Paine's presentation of Ancient Greece in *The Age of Reason* as an example of morality operating outside Christianity.⁶² A reviewer in 1800, for instance, accuses Wieland of rejecting Christianity and replacing it with Greek and Roman system of beliefs: 'He [Wieland] is also a declared enemy of the Christian religion, seriously prefers to it the absurd superstition of the Greeks and Romans, and sometimes speaks against it with the zeal of a persecutor.'⁶³

Macaulay's main concern in 'History' is to distinguish more rigorously myth from factual historical account. The historian's opinions in ancient historical texts were so often mixed indiscriminately with facts, that they make the process of telling them apart practically impossible:

The fictions [in Greek historical writing] are so much like the facts, and the facts so much like the fictions, that, with respect to many most interesting particulars, our belief is neither given nor withheld, but remains in an uneasy and interminable state of abeyance. We know that there is truth, but we cannot exactly decide where it lies.⁶⁴

⁶¹ On Carlyle's relations with Macaulay compare: J. M. Hart, 'Macaulay and Carlyle', *Modern Language Notes*, 3:5 (1888), pp. 113-119.

⁶² Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (New York: G.N. Devries, 1827), pp. 186-7. Compare also: Robert Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 136.

⁶³ 'The Literati and Literature of Germany', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 5:22 (1800), 568-580 (p. 571).

⁶⁴ Macaulay, 'History', in *The Miscellaneous Writings of Lord Macaulay*, vol. 1, 232-281 (p. 235).

Apparently unconsciously, Macaulay is adding to these traditions his own myth of a 'purely scientific' historical landscape which is devoid of any tensions and circumvents all interpretation (whereas Carlyle's German studies would have taught him Friedrich Schleiermacher's leading belief that there is no unmediated access to reality and that to perceive is already to mythologise). Macaulay's intellectual prejudice against the language of myth makes him see it as a distortion of truth and even as a deception on part of the ancient historians whose uncontrollable imagination supposedly predisposes them to tell lies 'even when they have no intention to deceive.'⁶⁵ Macaulay singlehandedly dismisses the mythical idiom of the ancient writers, such as Homer, as 'faults of a simple and imaginative mind.'⁶⁶ Imagination, the particular sphere of interest to Carlyle's Coleridgean taste, is here bluntly rejected by Macaulay as a valid historiographical tool. Homer's 'uneducated' historiography is supposedly as good as a story related by a porter (Homer) overheard by an 'educated man' (Macaulay). Macaulay has no patience for ancient historical accounts, which are too impure, mixed with myth, tradition, gossip and religious creed (all of which have no place in Macaulay's puritanical historical project) and especially *too violent* to be of moral benefit to the British reader (this, as we shall see, is part of Macaulay's utilitarian project of aestheticisation of morality). They were written, he thinks, for readers 'inquisitive, credulous, easily moved by religious awe or patriotic enthusiasm' in a language of 'infantine sweetness.'⁶⁷ Macaulay's taste is particularly offended by the theatrical aspect of Greek histories, in particular, the introduction of dialogues, a sign of the historian's immaturity and inability to think abstractly and to present the historical proceedings in a systematic form as a neat and logical process of causes and effects (a language philosophically questioned by David Hume, of which Macaulay seems unaware): 'So completely were men formed to these habits, that even writing acquired a conversational air. The philosophers adopted the form of dialogue, as the most natural mode of communicating knowledge.'⁶⁸ Macaulay combines his scientific project of basing history upon 'pure facts', rather than on their mythologised (and thus supposedly 'contaminated') versions, with a rather striking disrespect for facts, which he names 'the mere dross of history', and which he believes need to be interpretatively transformed in

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

order to fit into a given historical theory (in order to form a lesson in political ethics for the reader):

Facts are the mere dross of history. It is from the abstract truth which interpenetrates them, and lies latent among them like gold in the ore, that the mass derives its whole value: and the precious particles are generally combined with the baser in such a manner that the separation is a task of the utmost difficulty.⁶⁹

The main fault of the ancient historians, in Macaulay's opinion, is that they do not make the facts subservient to a theory of historical development: '[In Greek accounts] truth is exhibited in parts, and by glimpses. Innumerable clever hints are given; but no sound and durable system is erected.'⁷⁰ In order to progress from what Macaulay sees as the 'infancy' of historical depiction, and fit into Macaulay's scientific project, historiography needs to become 'less gossiping and less picturesque; but much more accurate, and somewhat more scientific.'⁷¹ All that is required of historiography is to record facts in their just proportions, and truth is perceived as simple and uncomplicated and easily translated into a logical theoretical construction.

Macaulay's supposedly scientific and objective project camouflages his personal aesthetics and theory of progressive historical development. To a degree that Macaulay is not willing to admit, his theory of history is subservient to his aesthetics of non-violence (or, perhaps we should say, of camouflaging the violence in order to achieve an aesthetically-pleasing result) and his perception of the British nineteenth-century civilisation as a superior model for all cultures and times.⁷² The ancient inventiveness is not so much (or not primarily) unscientific, as it is shocking and offending to the taste of an educated nineteenth-century man (because it is *indecent*). Thucydides' introduction of dialogues into his history 'violates not only the accuracy of history, but the decencies of fiction':

They give to the whole book something of the grotesque character of those Chinese pleasure-grounds in which perpendicular rocks of granite

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Cf. Godfrey Davies, 'The Treatment of Constitutional History in Macaulay's "History of England"', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 2:2 (1939), pp. 179-204.

start up in the midst of a soft green plain. Invention is shocking where truth is in such close juxtaposition with it.⁷³

Macaulay's historiography is designed not only to explain by means of one 'scientific' theory the confusion of historical events, but also to obfuscate the violent and 'indecent' past, to weave it into a narrative of progress and to present it as an aesthetically pleasing moral lesson for the contemporary readers:

In fiction, the principles are given, to find the facts: in history, the facts are given, to find the principles; and the writer who does not explain the phenomena as well as state them, performs only one half of his office.⁷⁴

According to Macaulay, Britain's moral superiority over France rests in the fact that it has never paid attention to the offensive 'barbarian' moral tongue of classical history. Overall, the worst passages in English history supposedly cannot match the barbarity of the ancient past:

Even those parts of our history over which, on some accounts, we would gladly throw a veil may be proudly opposed to those on which the moralists of antiquity loved most to dwell. The enemy of English liberty was not murdered by men whom he had pardoned and loaded with benefits. He was not stabbed in the back by those who smiled and cringed before his face.⁷⁵

The metaphor of throwing a veil over the indecencies of history is particularly apt in the description of Macaulay's historical agenda. In Macaulay's account, Britain's cultural history is altogether too frail to face a meeting or dialogue with anyone but its own self, and even when looking upon itself, it requires the charitable practice of veiling from our eyes the more offensive parts (a work 'mercifully' performed by the historian). In Macaulay's construct 'the educated man' is so easily shocked and his moral purity so easily corrupted that he can only cope with the distilled, pure and inoffensive abstracts served to him by the historian, and he is quite incapable of swallowing the violent aesthetics of a direct confrontation with historical violence. Britain has almost a moral obligation, according to Macaulay, to jealously treasure its historical heritage (smoothed and polished by an aesthetical historian) and to protect it from any foreign influences lest it become *impure* and *corrupt*. Indeed, English language is such a self-contained and 'perfect' cultural entity that it would be quite impossible to translate its idiom to

⁷³ Macaulay, 'History', p. 243.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

anyone from outside of Britain: 'It has a language, too, of its own, and a language singularly idiomatic, full of meaning to ourselves, scarcely intelligible to strangers.'⁷⁶ In Macaulay's radical historicism, any meaningful (historical) dialogue within or outside of British culture is, apparently, not only dangerous, but also impossible, and, thus, Britain apparently lacks a language of communication both with other cultures and with its own past.

In Macaulay's vision of moral progress, Britain is the leading nation. The historiography's special place in this agenda is to serve the utilitarian purpose of improving national morality further and of predicting the development of future events. Other than that, history as such apparently lacks any interest and can even be dangerous in distorting national morals, if not 'interpreted' by a skilled historian:

No past event has any intrinsic importance. The knowledge of it is valuable only as it leads us to form just calculations with respect to the future. A history which does not serve this purpose, though it may be filled with battles, treaties, and commotions, is as useless as the series of turnpike tickets collected by Sir Matthew Mite.⁷⁷

Carlyle, as we have already seen when reading his *Life of John Sterling*, comes gradually to reject the Whig utilitarian idea of the 'usefulness of history' and he is well acquainted with the attempts to purge history, culture and religion from their moral 'indecencies', notably from Leigh Hunt's (1784-1859) *Christianism: or Belief and Unbelief Reconciled* (1832), which Hunt sent to him in 1832.⁷⁸ In it, Hunt argued that religions

mix up with better things so many rude and mistaken passions, and involve contradictions, both divine and human, so incompatible with the present advanced state of knowledge and love of good, that they are found to be no less barbarous in the eyes of simplicity and common sense, than in those of a philosophy the most subtle.⁷⁹

As an exercise in making morality 'decent', Hunt quotes a daily litany of little 'moral' rules which are to be practised diligently every day. Instanced in the 'Rules of Life and Manners' is that everyone should 'keep [their] blood pure with the exercise and fresh air, and to be as conversant always with the air as befits creatures that exist only by

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁷⁸ *CL* 6:117.

⁷⁹ Leigh Hunt, *Religion of the Heart: A Manual of Faith and Duty* (London: John Chapman, 1853).

means of it.’⁸⁰ Ridiculous as Hunt’s set of supposed ‘moral’ (but clearly often purely physical) discipline may sound, it forms part of a larger Victorian project of reducing religion to a set of moral rules and subsequent aestheticisation of ethics (which will be fully embraced by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and John Ruskin (1819-1900)) of which Carlyle seems to be aware in his ‘Signs of the Times’ when he states that:

The true Church of England, at this moment, lies in the Editors of its Newspapers. These preach to the people daily, weekly; admonishing kings themselves; advising peace or war, with an authority which only the first Reformers, and a long-past class of Popes, were possessed of; inflicting moral censure; imparting moral encouragement, consolation, edification.⁸¹

Arnold’s aestheticised educational ideal is not far from Ruskin’s rigid artistic hero-worship in censoring art and culture along the moral-educational line. In a move examined by Terry Eagleton in his *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), Arnold and Ruskin are set on replacing morality with what is aesthetically pleasing, which, similarly to Macaulay’s historical agenda, often leads to a drastic historical amnesia.

Carlyle’s ‘History’ should be read as a direct challenge to Macaulay’s agenda of history writing. After provocatively invoking history in the first sentence in Greek as Clio, and calling her the ‘chief of the Muses’,⁸² Carlyle registers the concern that the (Whig) programme of making her the instructing teacher of humanity may lead to rendering her ‘austere and frigid’. The balanced, logical language which Carlyle presents as growing out of the polite culture of Hume and William Robertson (1721–1793) is no longer in tune with the contemporary world:

[W]hereas of old the charm of History lay chiefly in gratifying our common appetite for the wonderful, for the unknown, and her office was but as that of Minstrel and Story-teller, she has now farther become a Schoolmistress, and professes to instruct in gratifying. Whether with the stateliness of that venerable character, she may not have taken up something of its austerity and frigidity; whether in the logical terseness of a Hume or Robertson, the graceful ease and gay pictorial heartiness of a Herodotus or Froissart may not be wanting, is not the question for us here.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸¹ *CME* 2:114.

⁸² *CME* 2:168.

⁸³ *Ibid.* It appears that in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century the charm of Whig-inspired historiography was so strong that Carlyle’s voice was not treated seriously. In the preface, after quoting Carlyle’s discourse and his challenge to the ‘instructive’ purposes of historiography, the author comments

In his attempt to ‘body-forth’ (one of Carlyle’s favourite phrases) the glimpses of the revelations which his Muse has afforded him, the history writer becomes strangely associated with his muse in giving birth to his text, to the point of a bizarre gender-confusion which challenges Macaulay’s emphatically male stance (a move which Carlyle has learnt from Jean Paul Richter’s fictions in which provocative gender-mixing is the standard,⁸⁴ but which he also, more disturbingly, appears to have practised in real life, by sending to Goethe poetry, posing as his wife, Jane, and presenting his avowal ‘Of my Scot[t]ish love to kind Weimar’).⁸⁵

Whereas Macaulay, similarly to Edward Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89), is explicitly concerned to expunge both poetry and ‘religious superstition’ from historiography⁸⁶ (the first two being associated with the feminine discourse), Carlyle, inspired by Burke’s poetics, is eager to allow them free reign in his narrative. This vision is reminiscent of Newman’s dismissal of the historian’s objectivity (as constructed in the nineteenth century) and his stressing of the complex and broad perception of human rationality, which involves both spirit, intellect, taste and personal experience. At the beginning of his essay, Carlyle ironically dismisses the narrowness of the Whig project of presenting history as ‘philosophy teaching by experience’, by asking doubtfully if men have ever taken seriously the moral sermons presented to them by historians:

Far be it from us to disparage such teaching, the very attempt at which must be precious. Neither shall we too rigidly inquire: How much it has hitherto profited? Whether most of what little practical wisdom men have, has come from study of professed History, or from other less boasted sources, whereby, as matters now stand, a Marlborough may become

provocatively: ‘That these essays may gratify while instructing is the wish of the editors.’ ‘Preface’, in *Select Essays in Anglo-American Legal History*, vol. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1909), p. v.

⁸⁴ In the preface to *Siebenkäs* (1871) (omitted in the English translation) in order to narcissistically enjoy the company of his attractive namesake, Johanne Pauline, Jean Paul Richter has to talk into sleep her stern vigilant father. Cf. Jean Paul Richter, *Flower, Fruit and Thorn Pieces: or the Married Life, Death, and Wedding of the Advocate of the Poor, Firmian Stanislaus Siebenkäs*, trans. Edward Henry Noel (London: William Smith, 1845).

⁸⁵ In 1829 Jane writes in a letter to Margaret Carlyle: ‘[Carlyle] is over head and ears in business to night—writing letters to all the four winds—there is a box to be despatched for Goethe—containing all manner of curiosities—the most precious of which is a lock of my hair!! there is also a smart Highland bonnet for his daughter-in-law—accompanied by a nice little verse of poetry professing to be written by me but in truth I did not write a word of it—Scotland prides her in the “bonnet blue,”/ That it brooks no stain in love or war;/ Be it on Otilie's head a token true/ Of my Scot[t]ish love to kind Weimar.’ *CL* 5:38–40.

⁸⁶ ‘These extravagant tales, which display the fiction, without the genius, of poetry, have seriously affected the reason, the faith, and the morals of the Christians.’ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1998), p. 76.

great in the world's business with no History save what he derives from Shakespeare's Plays?⁸⁷

By situating himself in the tradition of the Shakespearean theatre, Carlyle proposes that history writing is much more of a dramatic and myth-mediated enterprise than the Whig project allows. People rarely take their historical perceptions from the logical constructs of historians, but instead more often listen to the powerfully constructed myths which speak to their imagination and heart. The questions which Carlyle presents to history are an expression of his vast and bold vision, which, unlike Macaulay's defensive and insular project, is to deal confidently with all earthly and spiritual affairs without any censorship whatsoever, as indeed did medieval eschatology:

What the aim and significance of that wondrous changeful Life it investigates and paints may be? Whence the course of man's destinies in this Earth originated, and whither they are tending? Or, indeed, if they have any course and tendency, are really guided forward by an unseen mysterious Wisdom, or only circle in blind mazes without recognizable guidance? Which questions, altogether fundamental, one might think, in any Philosophy of History, have, since the era when Monkish Annalists were wont to answer them by the long-ago extinguished light of their Missal and Breviary, been by most philosophical Historians only glanced at dubiously and from afar; by many, not so much as glanced at.⁸⁸

Rather than withdrawing from his culture into medievalism (as he will increasingly do in *Past and Present*), Carlyle shows himself here as a confident reader of the modern historicism which inspired the criticism of Thomas Warton (1728-1790), as well as of the higher criticism of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827), and challenges both with the wager that neither of them has so far been able to provide spiritual insight on contemporary times via their literary and theological criticism. The historian whom Carlyle is envisioning here will be able to re-unite man's spirituality with the new critical, theological and scientific discoveries:

Art also and Literature are intimately blended with Religion [...]. He who should write a proper History of Poetry, would depict for us the successive Revelations which man had obtained of the Spirit of Nature; under what aspects he had caught and endeavoured to body forth some glimpse of that unspeakable Beauty, which in its highest clearness is Religion, is the inspiration of a Prophet, yet in one or the other degree must inspire every true Singer, were his theme never so humble. [...] That

⁸⁷ *CME* 2:169.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.169-70.

among all our Eichhorns and Wartons there is no such Historian, must be too clear to everyone.⁸⁹

Carlyle's project, then, is to integrate the modern insights of the biblical (Eichhorn) and literary (Warton) historicism into the orthodox body of Scottish Calvinism, to reveal the supernatural through myth and history rather than simply to mythologise religion, as historicism progressively did. Whereas Carlylean criticism has essentially focused on Carlyle's rejection of fiction,⁹⁰ here, we may notice, Carlyle shows himself much more confident than Macaulay (who sees literature as a dangerous distortion of truth) in replenishing his historical narrative with religion, literature and myth ('gossip', in Macaulay's vocabulary), following the contemporary hermeneutic insights of Eichhorn and Schleiermacher. The historian's task is, then, to ask the most fundamental (spiritual) questions of his times and depict their various inspired poetic, mythical, and prophetic responses in each epoch. In Carlyle's historical sensibility, sharpened by his reading of German Higher Criticism, and most fully expressed perhaps in 'The Signs of the Times', no two epochs give the same answer to these questions dictated by the changing worldly concerns:

The inward condition of Life, it may rather be affirmed, the conscious or half-conscious aim of mankind, so far as men are not mere digesting-machines, is the same in no two ages; neither are the more important outward variations easy to fix on, or always well capable of representation.⁹¹

Rather than a straightforward depiction of the past, the historian looks upon his work as a palimpsest of innumerable texts, through which no man can read the divine fully, since it is 'a real Prophetic Manuscript, and can be fully interpreted by no man.' Instead, history must be seen as an 'ever-working Chaos of Being' which it would be unwise of the historian to try and master under his petty theories:

[I]t is an ever-lasting, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself forth from innumerable elements. And this Chaos, boundless as the habitation and duration of man, unfathomable as the soul and destiny of man, is what the historian will depict, and scientifically

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7.

⁹⁰ Levine, *The Boundaries of Fiction*, Edwards, 'Carlyle and the Fictions of Belief', Ikler, *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith*, Moore, *Thomas Carlyle and Fiction*, et al.

⁹¹ *CME* 2:115.

gauge, we may say, by threading it with single lines of a few ells in length!⁹²

Carlyle's hyperbolic depiction of the historian who treads a dangerous ground of 'Passion and Mystery' from which he is only able to distinguish some shapes from others among the countless influences which produce human action, rather than an expression of Carlyle's pessimism or disbelief in the historian's powers to demystify history, should be read as a direct challenge to the Whig historical agenda. The Whig historical apparatus, according to Carlyle, is unfit for the interpretation of historical data and of human experience which is essentially complex and 'mythical' (or, as we would say in the language of postmodernism, textual). What we see here is Carlyle seeking a language more open to the full nature of human experience: 'Truly, if History is Philosophy teaching by Experience, the writer fitted to compose History is hitherto an unknown man.'⁹³

With this agenda in mind, we shall now attempt a more positive reading of the linguistic and artistic 'confusion' of *The French Revolution*. In a crucial sense, Carlyle's work is a defence of the unpredictability and freedom of historical agents. This is done primarily by presenting the innumerable and often confusing and contradictory motifs of the events to the reader in such a way that moral judgments become complicated and often impossible. Such a technique is in tune with Carlyle's conviction that morality is a much more fragile, profound and often perplexing sphere than the moral progressivists would have it.

The chief prophet of Rousseau's 'New Evangel' in *The French Revolution*, Robespierre, the author of the new secular religion who will become the high priest of the carnivalesque mass of the new revolutionary order and who will make bloody sacrifices on the guillotine, is himself a common and inconspicuous man in Carlyle's depiction. Like the characters of 'The Diamond Necklace', he is an unlikely candidate to become a political leader and to initiate the reign of terror. To a certain extent, he is a man outwitted by the system of political terror and by the demons that he *awakens* and *releases* rather than *creates*. Robespierre's last march from the Palais de Justice to the Place de la Révolution is symbolic of his progress from the life of a conscientious lawyer to that of the bloody leader of the Revolution. Robespierre also symbolises one

⁹² *CME* 2: 172.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

of the essential insights of Carlyle's thought, namely that the revolutionary evil's chosen sphere of action is the lukewarm, indifferent, and narrow legalistic moral atmosphere in which Robespierre operates. Among Robespierre's contemporaries, he is seen as narrow-minded, and it is calculated that he will become 'an excellent man of business, happily quite free from genius.' Carlyle presents young Robespierre who, serving as a judge, benevolently resigns a case in which he is expected to condemn a man to death because 'his conscience will not permit the dooming of any son of Adam to die.' Apparently nothing in Robespierre's early character suggests his later conduct (except that the scrupulous and almost Pharisaic preoccupation with law, in spite of Robespierre's initial sympathy for his fellow citizens, becomes the inroad of evil in his later career):

Maximilien the first-born was thriftily educated [...]. With a strict painful mind, an understanding small but clear and ready, he grew in favour with official persons, who could foresee in him an excellent man of business, happily quite free from genius. The Bishop, therefore, taking counsel, appoints him Judge of his diocese; and he faithfully does justice to the people: till behold, one day, a culprit comes whose crime merits hanging; and the strict-minded Max must abdicate, for his conscience will not permit the dooming of any son of Adam to die. A strict-minded, strait-laced man! A man unfit for Revolutions? [...] We shall see.⁹⁴

Despite Robespierre's apparently benevolent and sympathetic character, Carlyle's repetition of the words 'strict-minded, strait-laced' and 'strict painful mind' suggests that Robespierre's scrupulous legalistic attitude may be motivated by other than philanthropic motifs and that it prefigures his later lack of human sympathy for the pain of the enemies of the Revolution.⁹⁵ Whereas here we see Robespierre, before the Revolution, renouncing his career because 'his conscience will not permit the dooming of any son of Adam to die', this statement becomes the poetic leitmotif of Robespierre's life, which we hear echoed in the scenes of the September Massacres when Carlyle ironically repeats Robespierre's initially sympathetic words, now contrasted with his cruel deeds. The Enlightenment vision of human sympathy is here transformed into its Gothic and uncanny other, in tune with Carlyle's Calvinist intuition that human nature is often darker than Enlightenment philosophy envisions it:

⁹⁴ *FR* 1:141.

⁹⁵ Compare the depiction of Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus*, whose apparent philanthropy is unmasked as hidden moral aloofness and self-love, discussed more closely in the Chapter Three of present thesis.

A thousand and eighty-nine lie dead, 'two hundred and sixty heaped carcasses on the Pont au Change' itself;—among which, Robespierre pleading afterwards will 'nearly weep' to reflect that there was said to be one slain innocent. [...] One; not two, O thou seagreen Incorruptible?⁹⁶

During Robespierre's later cold meeting with Danton, before the guillotining of the latter, Robespierre's reference to justice and his conscience become each time more sinister and indeed demonic:

'It is right,' said Danton, swallowing much indignation, 'to repress the Royalists: but we should not strike except where it is useful to the Republic; we should not confound the innocent and the guilty.'—'And who told you,' replied Robespierre with a poisonous look, 'that one innocent person had perished?'—⁹⁷

This gradual distortion of Robespierre's originally benevolent attitude is another leading theme of Carlyle's text, in which human conscience and reason fall prey to Gothic textual and linguistic mutations. In Carlyle's vocabulary, high moral principles in this world often 'body-forth' uncanny and indeed demonic conduct. In an orthodox Christian reading, this is the main law upon which evil operates, via distorting and supplementing or engrafting upon good. Carlyle uses one of his favourite motifs of demonic possession, already rehearsed in his earlier works, in the description of Robespierre's death.⁹⁸ One of the darkest Gothic images, comparable perhaps to Francisco Goya's portrayals of human irrationality, it focuses closely on Robespierre, with whose death the revolutionary demons supposedly depart and justice is restored. Far from embracing such a simple reading, though, Carlyle suggests that the demons that possessed France do not depart, but instead enter into the crowd that watches and applauds Robespierre's execution. Robespierre's last inarticulate and beast-like cry is reminiscent of the biblical depiction of Christ's casting out the demons which enter into a herd of pigs (Compare Matthew 8:28-32). Carlyle presents the ominous shout of applause of the crowd as an echo of Robespierre's animalistic cry. The crowd's lack of sympathy for Robespierre now dying, and reduced almost to an animal, is an ominous echo of own treatment of his nation. This demonic imagery is then broadened so as to apparently include also the reader, as Carlyle depicts the shout of applause echoing and ominously reverberating throughout the ages until the time of Carlyle's writing ('down

⁹⁶ *FR* 3:41.

⁹⁷ *FR* 3:255.

⁹⁸ *Cf.*, *Sartor Resartus*, 'Count Cagliostro', *et al.*

to this Generation’), challenging the readers to consider their own reaction to recent French history:

Robespierre opened his eyes; ‘*Scelerat*, go down to Hell, with the curses of all wives and mothers!’—At the foot of the scaffold, they stretched him on the ground till his turn came. Lifted aloft, his eyes again opened; caught the bloody axe. Samson wrenched the coat off him; wrenched the dirty linen from his jaw: the jaw fell powerless, there burst from him a cry;—hideous to hear and see. Samson, thou canst not be too quick! Samson’s work done, there burst forth shout on shout of applause. Shout, which prolongs itself not only over Paris, but over France, but over Europe, and down to this Generation.⁹⁹

At the same time, through his last inarticulate cry, Robespierre can be seen to be finally reunited to the cry of pain of his nation, which Carlyle reads as the bearer of Eucharistic sacrificial language,¹⁰⁰ while France itself becomes a symbol of all European nations fighting for freedom. In Carlyle’s depiction, French history is engrafted onto the biblical image of the Ark of the Covenant in which the old law was contained. Similarly to the Christian initiation of the new moral law, so too the French Revolution marks a new era in history:

Yes, in that silent marching mass there lies Futurity enough. No symbolic Ark, like the old Hebrews, do these men bear: yet with them too is a Covenant; they too preside at a new Era in the History of Men. The whole Future is there, and Destiny dim-brooding over it; in the hearts and unshaped thoughts of these men, it lies illegible, inevitable. Singular to think: they have it in them; yet not they, not mortal, only the Eye above can read it,—as it shall unfold itself, in fire and thunder, of siege, and

⁹⁹ *FR* 3:285.

¹⁰⁰ Compare: Desaulniers: ‘The Eucharist as symbol of brotherhood and community is displaced in The French Revolution by images of consumption, the kind of obsessive devouring Marion Woodman in *Addiction to Perfection* describes as ‘the eucharist’ gone ‘demonic’. [...] This distinction between demonic and symbolic Eucharist becomes one of the central Gothic motifs in *The French Revolution*. Here, Carlyle echoes the anti-papist sentiments exploited in most Gothic novels as a point of departure for crimes of repression and vengeance.’ Desaulniers, pp. 80-1. Compare also the imagery of Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, arguably borrowed from Carlyle’s Eucharistic imagery: ‘A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street. The accident had happened in getting it out of a cart; the cask had tumbled out with a run, the hoops had burst, and it lay on the stones just outside the door of the wine-shop, shattered like a walnut-shell. [...] The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street in the suburb of Saint Antoine, in Paris, where it was spilled. It had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes. The hands of the man who sawed the wood, left red marks on the billets; and the forehead of the woman who nursed her baby, was stained with the stain of the old rag she wound about her head again. Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees—blood. The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there.’ Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 47.

field-artillery; in the rustling of battle-banners, the tramp of hosts, in the glow of burning cities, the shriek of strangled nations!¹⁰¹

In an intended pun,¹⁰² Carlyle ends by theatrically dropping the curtain over the ‘Tail [rather than ‘tale’] of Robespierre’, teasing the readers again to reconsider their own narration of the French Revolution. The demonic element human history is far less obviously discernible than human fallen narrations would have it. Like Cagliostro, Robespierre might appear to be the demon of the story, but ultimately he is only human and shares humanity with the reader. Not Robespierre, but the whole ‘tale’ (or devil’s tail) constructed around the Revolution in France, and, for Carlyle’s British perspective, specifically in Britain, is of a suspect and demonic nature. More generally still, we are reminded again, as we were in Cagliostro’s last speech earlier, that no human narratives are to be fully trusted, and all historiography is but a ‘gossip’, that is a mixture of truth and lie, ‘Truth Wedded to Sham’.¹⁰³

Carlyle’s imagery suggests also his mixed perception of nascent democracy. In *The Condition of England Question: Carlyle, Mill, Engels* Michael Levin comments on Carlyle’s contradictory attitude towards democracy:

Part of the fascination with Carlyle’s writings is the problem of placing him politically. His contempt for the powerful and compassion for the weak gave him an appeal for the left. Yet they found him a strange bedfellow, for his authoritarianism placed him more in the company of the political right.¹⁰⁴

This paradox, I would argue, is channelled primarily through Carlyle’s aesthetics. Whereas we have seen Carlyle depict the French struggle for freedom in epic terms, as a justified rebellion against corrupt and anachronistic tradition, he elsewhere also seems to build a Calvinist opposition between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms, and a fatal disjunction between the body and the soul which all his texts address in hope of a reunion:

¹⁰¹ *FR* 1:134.

¹⁰² Compare an early review of *Sartor Resartus* in *Monthly Review* from 1838, which begins similarly by a pun on the devilish connotations in Carlyle’s work: ‘Hereby hangs a tale or a tail, it matters little which way you take it, although the latter term may under certain views be preferred, because the book is about a *tailor re-tailored*.’ Cf. D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, 15-17 (p. 15).

¹⁰³ ‘The Diamond Necklace’, p. 438.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Levin, *The Condition of England Question: Carlyle, Mill, Engels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 114.

It is towards a higher freedom than mere freedom from oppression by his fellow-mortal, that man dimly aims. Of this higher, heavenly freedom, which is 'man's reasonable service,' all his noble institutions, his faithful endeavours and loftiest attainments, are but the body, and more and more approximated emblem.¹⁰⁵

Aside from Carlyle's recognition that the French uprising is rational, and that it can be rationally justified, Carlyle seems to suggest that it can *only* be justified as a spiritual struggle for heavenly freedom, which, as 'man's reasonable service', appears disjointed from the political sphere. If so, then Carlyle seems to have a limited sympathy for the physical and political condition of the French nation and perhaps also enters the language of the metaphysical philosopher, Professor Teufelsdröckh, whose diabolical sublimated look we examined earlier.

Seen as the carrier of the sublime, the French nation is an object of Carlyle's admiration, yet in their physical reality, they seem to be the seat of irrational passions for which Carlyle often appears to have little sympathy. This dual presentation of the French nation accounts for the paradoxical contrasts in Carlyle's attitude towards democracy. While Carlyle associates French masses with the Catholic mass, he is simultaneously profoundly suspicious of this Catholic, carnal imagery. This is partly due to Carlyle's association of the failed Gothic mass with Rousseau's philosophical 'Evangel', of which he sees the French to celebrate their 'holy sacrament', and which is the object of Carlyle's critique. Yet, there is also a deeper disagreement with the abundant physicality which Carlyle associates with the Catholic rite, and which the text both Gothically stages and discredits. *The French Revolution* reveals a prevailing fear and disgust at the physical side of the crowd, which Carlyle describes as a 'mouldering mass of Sensuality and Falsehood.'¹⁰⁶ Whereas elsewhere Carlyle presents the French nation as the symbol of the Eucharistic unity in opposition to Robespierre's false priesthood, in what follows it appears that Robespierre's demons have already poisoned the masses since '[m]asses of people capable of being led away by quacks are themselves of partially untrue spirit.'¹⁰⁷ Carlyle's admiration for the sublimity of the revolutionary masses gives way to Calvinist condemnation of the body:

How is our bright Era of Hope dimmed: and the whole sky growing bleak
with signs of hurricane and earthquake! It is a doomed world: gone all

¹⁰⁵ *CME* 2:214.

¹⁰⁶ *FR* 1:58.

¹⁰⁷ *Works* 29: 151.

‘obedience that made men free;’ fast going the obedience that made men slaves,—at least to one another. Slaves only of their own lusts they now are, and will be. Slaves of sin; inevitably also of sorrow. Behold the mouldering mass of Sensuality and Falsehood; round which plays foolishly, itself a corrupt phosphorescence, some glimmer of Sentimentalism;—and over all, rising, as Ark of their Covenant, the grim Patibulary Fork ‘forty feet high;’ which also is now nigh rotted. Add only that the French Nation distinguishes itself among Nations by the characteristic of Excitability.¹⁰⁸

Carlyle’s sublime depiction of the masses oscillates between admiration and disgust with the coarse physical nature of the crowd. As in his later presentation of the masses of Irish immigrants in *Chartism* (1839), for whom he also holds physical disgust, Carlyle’s mob in *The French Revolution* is given no voice. Carlyle is clearly drawing here from Burke’s aesthetic presentation of the masses.¹⁰⁹ Burke’s aesthetics associate the sublime with the forces of nature and, accordingly, in yet another pun, Carlyle presents the French crowd as the ‘Galvanic Masses’ on the point of explosion (taken perhaps directly from *Blackwood’s* interest in electricity):¹¹⁰

France is as a monstrous Galvanic Mass, wherein all sorts of far stranger than chemical galvanic or electric forces and substances are at work; electrifying one another, positive and negative; filling with electricity your Leyden-jars,—Twenty-five millions in number! As the jars get full, there will, from time to time, be, on slight hint, an explosion.¹¹¹

Here then, we have another use of the language of the sublime, this time to present the dangerous, unpredictable and apparently incomprehensible aspect of the French masses. In *Past and Present* (1843) Carlyle represents masses as the forces of nature, portrayed as a mythical Sphinx that poses an inarticulate question to the reader, but is not capable of entering into a dialogue or acting rationally:

¹⁰⁸ *FR* 1:57.

¹⁰⁹ The association of Carlyle’s text with Burke’s idiom of the sublime is confirmed in the contemporary reception of *The French Revolution* in John Wilson’s review. Wilson instinctively recognises in *The French Revolution* the language of terror borrowed from ‘the greatest Prose Work’ since ever’ (Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*), while he also seems aware of Carlyle’s challenge to the conservative vision of the Revolution: ‘Thomas Carlisle [sic] seems to care little for Edmund Burke, but Christopher North cares much for Thomas Carlisle.’ *Blackwood’s*, 42 (1837), 592-93, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, pp. 55-56, p. 55.

¹¹⁰ The geological language of *The French Revolution* has been convincingly examined by John Burrow: John Burrow, ‘Images of time: From Carlylean Vulcanism to sedimentary gradualism’, in *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750–1950*, ed. by Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Burrow called Carlyle *French Revolution* ‘the most extended historiographical exploration of the mode of the apocalyptic sublime’. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹¹¹ *FR* 2:113.

Nature, like the Sphinx, is of womanly celestial loveliness and tenderness; the face and bosom of a goddess, but ending in claws and the body of a lioness. There is in her a celestial beauty,—which means celestial order, pliancy to wisdom; but there is also a darkness, a ferocity, fatality, which are infernal. She is a goddess, but one not yet disimprisoned; one still half-imprisoned,—the inarticulate, lovely still encased inarticulate chaotic. [...] Nature [...] is as a heavenly bride and conquest to the wise and brave, to them who can discern her behests and do them; a destroying fiend to them who cannot. Answer her riddle, it is well with thee. Answer it not [...] the solution for thee is a thing of teeth and claws; Nature is a dumb lioness, deaf to thy pleadings, fiercely devouring. Thou art not now her victorious bridegroom; thou art her mangled victim, scattered on the precipices, as a slave found treacherous, recreant, ought to be and must.¹¹²

In contrast with the earlier, more inclusive construction of femininity in the ‘History’, as an open and creative aspect of his historical agenda, here we see an expression of Carlyle’s male fear at not being able to fulfil his bride’s ‘natural’ expectations translated into a political language (it has been assumed that the marriage between Carlyle and Jane was never consummated).¹¹³ The political marriage of the French masses with its leaders is an uncanny and dangerous affair. Like German Romantic writings (which, as we have seen, channel for Carlyle the French experience), France is, for Carlyle, at best a ‘*belle sauvage*’, fascinating, but also precarious and, in many ways, physically revolting, animalistic and inarticulate. In the ‘State of German Literature’, Carlyle writes:

In short, the German Muse comports herself, it is said, like a passionate and rather fascinating, but tumultuous, uninstructed, and but half-civilised Muse. A *belle sauvage* at best, we can only love her with a sort of supercilious tolerance; often she tears a passion to rags; and, in her tumid vehemence, struts without meaning, and to the offence of all literary decorum.¹¹⁴

The ‘supercilious tolerance’ which Carlyle, writing for *The Edinburgh Review*, patronisingly grants his Muse, can also be seen in *The French Revolution*. The fear of

¹¹² *Works* 10:7.

¹¹³ The story of Carlyle’s escape in the middle of the night from one bed, which was prepared for him and Jane by his mother-in-law, can perhaps serve as an example of Carlyle’s sexual attitude. Desperate of getting any sleep in a bed which was ‘six inches too short’, Carlyle rose up at three in the morning and rode to another town (without Jane). Here is Carlyle’s version of the story: ‘Jamie took charge of Ellen along to the Cottage here, I drove off with Jane towards Dumfries and Templand, purposing to stay with her there till the Monday came. Templand was already crammed with Liverpool guests; our bed was six inches too short; I had slept ill for two nights before, and Jane for one night had not slept at all: the result was, there could no wink of sleep be had there for me, and very few winks for poor Jane: wherefore, about three in the morning, I arose, packed up my bag, yoked my Gig, and drove off again towards Dumfries and Scotsbrig, thro’ the blessed dawn.’ *CL* 13:200-203.

¹¹⁴ *CME* 1:29.

the physical and gradual association of the masses with sheer physicality, is something that becomes a major theme in Carlyle's later writings, leading eventually to his rejection of democratic system and full-fledged support of political dictatorship in *Dr. Francia* (1843). In the 'Corn-Law Rhymes' (1832), a review of the poetry of Ebenezer Elliott (a poet leading the fight to repeal the Corn Laws), while expressing his sympathy with the condition of the poor, Carlyle is crudely unsympathetic to Elliott's political quest and bluntly refuses Elliott a political voice, while advising him to choose other artistic themes:

[A]ll Reform except a moral one will prove unavailing. Political Reform, pressingly enough wanted, can indeed root out the weeds (gross deep-fixed lazy dock-weeds, poisonous obscene hemlocks, ineffectual spurry in abundance); but it leaves the ground empty, - ready either for noble fruits, or for new worse tares!¹¹⁵

In what follows, Carlyle satirises the higher classes and shows them to be unprepared for the democratic changes. However, his biblical depiction of the working classes as Balaam's ass, which has only begun to speak (even when seen as a satire on aristocracy) can hardly be read as sympathetic. Carlyle quotes from the Book of Numbers the story of Balaam, whose donkey suddenly begins to converse in human tongue, to the utter surprise of his owner:

[T]he thin crust of Respectability has cracked asunder; and a bottomless prenatal Inane yawns under him instead. Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness! the spirit-stirring Vote, the ear-piercing Hear; the big Speech that makes ambition virtue; soft Palm-greasing first of raptures, and Cheers that emulate sphere-music: Balaam's occupation's gone!¹¹⁶

Carlyle's mock sublime is used satirically here to illustrate the hypocrisy of the British aristocracy not willing to give power to the lower (cl)asses, a mood we see reflected also in *The French Revolution* in some of its most impressive passages, such as the depiction of the birth of democracy in America to the inexpressible surprise of King Louis and the whole Western world:

The world is all so changed; so much that seemed vigorous has sunk decrepit, so much that was not is beginning to be!—Borne over the Atlantic, to the closing ear of Louis, King by the Grace of God, what sounds are these; muffled ominous, new in our centuries? Boston Harbour is black with unexpected Tea: behold a Pennsylvanian Congress gather;

¹¹⁵ *CME* 3:175.

¹¹⁶ *CME* 3:178.

and ere long, on Bunker Hill, DEMOCRACY announcing, in rifle-volleys death-winged, under her Star Banner, to the tune of Yankee-doodle-doo, that she is born, and, whirlwind-like, will envelope the whole world!¹¹⁷

Carlyle's parody of the fear of democratic change in Britain is masterfully rendered in this depiction, where the statement: 'Boston Harbour is black with unexpected Tea' and the noisy progress of the Pennsylvanian Congress to the tune of Yankee-doodle-doo is an equivalent of the aristocratic surprise at biblical Balaam's speaking donkey.

Carlyle's association of the masses with the Catholic mass can be strongly linked to this democratic discussion. In the nineteenth century popular anti-Catholic propaganda, the transubstantiation of the holy Eucharist is frequently parodied as an alchemical search for gold:

Gold undoubtedly approximates to the nature of a criterion; but to consider it, in a commercial country, as possessing any more sacred character than that of a commodity, is one of those inconceivable absurdities which may be classed with faith in rotten bones and transubstantiation.¹¹⁸

Carlyle seems to know this alchemical language well, since he plays on it in *Sartor*, by representing Teufelsdröckh's philosophical studies as an alchemical quest for the Philosopher's Stone:

Teufelsdröckh, though a Sansculottist, is in practice probably the politest man extant: his whole heart and life are penetrated and informed with the spirit of politeness; a noble natural Courtesy shines through him, beautifying his vagaries; like sunlight, making a rosyfingered, rainbow-dyed Aurora out of mere aqueous clouds; nay brightening London-smoke itself into gold vapor, as from the crucible of an alchemist.¹¹⁹

Teufelsdröckh's Jacobin philosophy is in this depiction clearly linked to the nineteenth-century anti-Catholic imagery. Simultaneously, Teufelsdröckh's delusive alchemical procedures channel the discussion of the concept of the 'Age of Gold', which in the Enlightenment debate between Locke, Rousseau and Hobbes is another name for the 'state of nature'. The discussion goes at least as far as the Reformation debate on the postlapsarian state of humanity, where Luther presents humanity as devoid of rational powers, free-will, and morality. Luther's scepticism towards the powers of human

¹¹⁷ *FR* 1:7.

¹¹⁸ John Galt, *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George IV*, vol. 4 (London: Henry Colburn, 1838-9), pp. 294-6.

¹¹⁹ *SR*: 176.

conscience in its postlapsarian state, led him to see humanity as being able to follow good only through a literal and irrational obedience to faith, as channelled through the biblical scriptures (a position that Carlyle counters in his ‘Signs of the Times’ via a stress on reason, conscience and free will). Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) translates this theological tradition into political language, by refusing the citizens the powers of free will and rational debate, and replacing them with unquestioning obedience to the sovereign (‘The liberty which writers praise, is the liberty of sovereigns, not of private men’¹²⁰). Since the subjects relinquish their power of judgment to the sovereign, they are morally forbidden from questioning the sovereign’s rule and from rebelling against an unjust ruler.¹²¹

In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (1841), Carlyle shifts the original metaphor of gold from the debate on the ‘state of nature’ to hero-worship, the crux of the Victorian conservative outlook. Whereas in his earlier writings up to *The French Revolution* gold marks the common denominator of all humanity, in *Heroes* the metaphor is reserved for the elect who are capable of governing and disciplining the fallen mankind. Next to Carlyle’s despair over democratic order, *Heroes* also marks the rejection of the Enlightenment search for a rational dialogue on morality and reveals Carlyle’s scepticism (increasingly leading to despair) about the role played by human conscience and free will. In the introduction to *Heroes*, Carlyle associates gold explicitly with hero-worship and condemns the Revolutionary ideas of ‘Democracy, Liberty and Equality’:

Society is founded on Hero-worship. [...] They [heroes] are all as bank-notes, these social dignitaries, all representing gold;—and several of them, alas, always are forged notes. We can do with some forged false notes; with a good many even; but not with all, or the most of them

¹²⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 166.

¹²¹ Carlyle somewhat disturbingly (in anticipation of his racist and pro-slavery *Latter-Day Pamphlets*) echoes in *The French Revolution* the language of Hobbes when he, apparently ironically, laments the passing of the feudal customs, which are no longer credible to the modern reader: ‘These men call themselves supports of the throne, singular gilt-pasteboard caryatides in that singular edifice! For the rest, their privileges every way are now much curtailed. That law authorizing a Seigneur, as he returned from hunting, to kill not more than two Serfs, and refresh his feet in their warm blood and bowels, has fallen into perfect desuetude,—and even into incredibility; for if Deputy Lapoule can believe in it, and call for the abrogation of it, so cannot we.’ *FR* 1:12. Compare Hobbes: ‘nothing the sovereign representative can do to a subject, on what pretence soever, can properly be called injustice, or injury; because every subject is author of every act the sovereign doth; so that he never wanteth right to any thing, otherwise, than as he himself is the subject of God, and bound thereby to observe the laws of nature. And therefore it may, and doth often happen in commonwealths, that a subject may be put to death, by the command of the sovereign power; and yet neither do the other wrong.’ Hobbes, p. 165-6.

forged! No: there have to come revolutions then; cries of Democracy, Liberty and Equality, and I know not what [...] ‘Gold,’ Hero-worship, is nevertheless, as it was always and everywhere, and cannot cease till man himself ceases.¹²²

Carlyle’s later texts approach Hobbes’s position, according to which only strong political leaders are the bearers of political and moral authority, which becomes gradually reduced to aesthetic taste.¹²³ The direct condemnation of democracy comes here hand-in-hand with the sacralisation of political order, which, in Hobbes’s theory of the state, is presented as the Kingdom of God realised on earth. Carlyle’s rejection of democracy is even more explicit in his admiring depiction of Oliver Cromwell in *Heroes*, and his subsequent publication of Cromwell’s letters, where he consistently dismisses any power granted to the parliament by Cromwell even in the early stages of the civil war.¹²⁴

Given these later ultra-conservative texts, *The French Revolution* presents a more nuanced and inconclusive approach. Rousseau’s construct of a pre-moral state of brotherhood and freedom is unacceptable from Carlyle’s Calvinist point of view. In the chapter ‘The Age of Gold’, he gives account of the famous patriotic mass celebrated on the Anniversary of the fall of the Bastille on 14 July 1790 on Champ de Mars. He represents the scene in Edenic imagery, which is distinctly suspect to Carlyle’s postlapsarian image of the world as a permanent blend of good and evil: ‘living garden spotted and dotted with such flowerage; all colours of the prism; the beautifullest blent friendly with the usefullest; all growing and working brotherlike there.’¹²⁵ Carlyle’s depiction of the act of union of the French nation is built upon Rousseau’s image of ‘the state of nature’ (Age of Gold):

¹²² Works 5:12.

¹²³ ‘*Good*, and *evil*, are names that signify our appetites, and aversions; which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men, are different: and divers men, differ not only in their judgement, on the senses of what is pleasant, and unpleasant to the taste, smell, hearing, touch, and sight; but also of what is conformable, or disagreeable to reason, in the actions of common life.’ Hobbes, p. 119.

¹²⁴ Compare Carlyle’s depiction of Cromwell in *Heroes and Hero Worship*: ‘Well, I must say, the *vulpine* intellect, with its knowingness, its alertness and expertness in ‘detecting hypocrites,’ seems to me a rather sorry business. We have had but one such Statesman in England; one man, that I can get sight of, who ever had in the heart of him any such purpose at all. One man, in the course of fifteen hundred years; and this was his welcome. He had adherents by the hundred or the ten; opponents by the million. Had England rallied all round him,—why, then, England might have been a *Christian* land! As it is, vulpine knowingness sits yet at its hopeless problem, ‘Given a world of Knaves, to educe an Honesty from their united action;’—how cumbrous a problem, you may see in Chancery Law-Courts, and some other places!’ Till at length, by Heaven’s just anger, but also by Heaven’s great grace, the matter begins to stagnate; and this problem is becoming to all men a *palpably* hopeless one.—’ Works 5:227.

¹²⁵ FR 2:59.

And so now bursts forth that effulgence of Parisian enthusiasm, good-heartedness and brotherly love; such, if Chroniclers are trustworthy, as was not witnessed since the Age of Gold. Paris, male and female, precipitates itself towards its South-west extremity, spade on shoulder. Streams of men, without order; or in order, as ranked fellow-craftsmen, as natural or accidental reunions, march towards the Field of Mars. Three-deep these march; to the sound of stringed music; preceded by young girls with green boughs, and tricolor streamers: they have shouldered, soldier-wise, their shovels and picks; and with one throat are singing *ça ira*.¹²⁶

In the colourful and theatrically-staged depiction of the Revolutionary brotherhood during the mass in Champ de Mars, Carlyle sees the prefiguration of the Massacre to come in the following year. In Carlyle's Calvinist view, brotherly communion of men in this world is a precarious state that is easily converted into its (demonic) opposite, a view which is suggested in the last sentence of the depiction which introduces death into this symbolic garden of Eden:

Longfrocked tonsured Monks, with short-skirted Water-carriers, with swallow-tailed well-frizzled Incroyables of a Patriot turn; dark Charcoalmen, meal-white Peruke-makers; or Peruke-wearers, for Advocate and Judge are there, and all Heads of Districts: sober Nuns sisterlike with flaunting Nymphs of the Opera, and females in common circumstances named unfortunate: the patriot Rag-picker, and perfumed dweller in palaces; for Patriotism like New-birth, and also like Death, levels all.¹²⁷

Carlyle is both fascinated by the creative imaginativeness and the theatricality of this scene of national union and, like Burke, sees it as precarious and easily corrupted. He mocks Rousseau's depiction of the state of nature as the uncontaminated 'infancy' of mankind, by addressing the revolutionaries:

Amiable infants, *aimables enfans*! They do the '*police des l'atelier*' too, the guidance and governance, themselves; with that ready will of theirs, with that extemporaneous adroitness. It is a true brethren's work; all distinctions confounded, abolished; as it was in the beginning, when Adam himself delved.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ *FR* 2:56.

¹²⁷ *FR* 2:57.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* Compare Thomas Paine's imagery in the *Rights of Man* (1791), where he argues for the dignity of all men expressed in their equal rights which transcend any theological, social or political construct: 'Though I mean not to touch upon any sectarian principle of religion, yet it may be worth observing, that the genealogy of Christ is traced to Adam. Why then not trace the rights of man to the creation of man? [...] Every history of the creation, and every traditionary account, whether from the lettered or unlettered world, however they may vary in their opinion or belief of certain particulars, all agree in establishing one point, the unity of man; by which I mean that men are all of one degree, and consequently that all men are

In this biblical idiom, the newly achieved French national communion is seen both as profoundly symbolic and, yet ultimately of no permanence. The apparent rejection of democracy as a utopian (Edenic) project here, contrasts with his intricate, lively and detailed depiction of the scene which can indeed be seen in anagogic language as a moment of prefiguration of the brotherly communion of all people.

The scene of 'Edenic' union of the French people is also reminiscent of Carlyle's personal myths, which can help us to understand his political and aesthetic positions. Edenic imagery in Carlyle's personal life connotes an escape from the political, and also his rejection of the body. This is instanced in Carlyle's depiction of Craigenputtock, where he moved with Jane in 1828, forsaking life in the city in order to live in what he thought at time was a 'green oasis'. For six years the Carlyles lived in complete isolation, communicating with the world via correspondence (the sheer amount of Carlyle's letters is an outstanding phenomenon even in Victorian Britain). Carlyle gradually persuaded reluctant Jane to the move to Craigenputtock, by painting their life in seclusion as a return to paradise (whereas it turned out to be the opposite, and cost both little less than a mental breakdown).¹²⁹ In Carlyle's description of Craigenputtock to Jane, there is a mixture of delight and disgust with the filth associated with the 'nakedness of the land', which we already recognise as traits of his aesthetic idiom. Carlyle's imagery is taken from the biblical description of Egypt, where Joseph accuses his brothers of coming to spy on the 'nakedness of the land': 'And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.' (Genesis. 42:9). In what could perhaps be read in Freudian idiom as an uncanny Calvinist sexual depiction of his repulsion at the sight of the naked (female) body ('the nakedness of the land was revealed to me'), Carlyle reverses in disgust from taking possession of Craigenputtock. The Gothic fascination and simultaneous repulsion with the physical aspects of the Revolution can be read as echoes of this imagery:

born equal, and with equal natural right, in the same manner as if posterity had been continued by creation instead of generation, the latter being the only mode by which the former is carried forward; and consequently every child born into the world must be considered as deriving its existence from God. The world is as new to him as it was to the first man that existed, and his natural right in it is of the same kind.' Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (London: J.S Jordan, 1791), pp. 48-9.

¹²⁹ 'O Jeanie! How happy we shall be in this Craig o' Putto! Not that I look for an Arcadia or a Lubberland there; but we shall sit under our bramble and our saugh-tree [shrubby willow tree] and none to make us afraid; and my little wife will be there forever beside me, and I shall be well and blessed, and the latter end of that man will be better than the beginning.' *CL* 4:215-219.

Better, I thought, if he [Mr Blacklock, the tenant] had taken a rake and scraped away a little of the filth and glar [muck] with which all parts of his premises from the cow-stall to the parlour (literally) were inundated; better if he had been thatching his stript mill-shed, or mending one of the many holes and gaps in his stone dikes! [...] I came upon the people unawares, and all the nakedness of the land was revealed to me. [...] if the Craig o' Putto were mine, I really think I would almost rather build a ring-fence round it, and leave it gratis to the tee wheets [lapwings], than allow such an unprincipled (I fear this is the word, unprincipled) sloven to farm it for money.¹³⁰

Craigenputtock is presented here unflatteringly as a fallen and dirty paradise full of 'filth and glar' (mud), which needs to be regained and 'civilised' for Jane and Carlyle's use. In Carlyle's sublime depiction of *The French Revolution* we see a similar aesthetics at work, whereby revolutionary 'filth' is sublimated in Carlyle's artistic depiction, so as to become a 'habitable' terrain.

The same pattern of isolation and escape is repeated after Carlyle's move to London, where he oscillates between joining social, political and literary life, and hiding in his personal study office. In their house in Chelsea, Carlyle famously had a special soundproof attic constructed for the lavish amount of £170 supposedly to prevent the sound of cocks which he could hear from the street.¹³¹ Jenni Calder has insightfully examined the Victorian dream to gain separateness from the outside world in her study of the Victorian house: 'There was dirt, there was noise, there was human excrement, there was starvation, there was crime, there was violence [in the urban world]. [...] To have an interior environment that enabled such things to be forgotten was a priority of middle-class aspiration.'¹³² For the Carlyles, it was not only the dirt that they wanted to keep away from, but also the fear of the outbreaks of cholera. In 1832 Carlyle ostensibly dismisses the cholera panic in London as unnecessary in a letter to John Aitken:

¹³⁰ CL 4:202-206.

¹³¹ The homosexual overtones of Carlyle's imagery are arguably revealed in his rhyme included in a letter to Sterling:

Cock-a-doodle-doo, cuck-cuck,
What an ass is Carlyle,
Stood not, on our guide-post stuck,
The invaluable Sterling!
Cock-a-doodle-doo, this, this,
This the road, ye dolts you!
Road to Nowhere not amiss,
Road to Somewhere jolts so!——

CL 13: 262-263.

¹³² Jenni Calder, *The Victorian Home* (London: Batsford, 1977), p. 15.

What is there new in cholera? Death has not been new here for the last six thousand years. [...] I do not participate in the panic. We were close beside cholera for many weeks in London: 'every ball has its billet.'¹³³

Notwithstanding these protestations, Carlyle adds dramatically in a postscript: 'tell me only that you are all spared alive!'¹³⁴ In the same contradictory attitude Carlyle used to 'lecture' Jane, as she complains in her letters, when she became sad about her mother's death 'which shuts up all my sorrow in my own heart for weeks after'¹³⁵ (yet, when his own mother was dying in 1853, he wrote melodramatically to his brother: '[T]he thing that I have feared, all my life ever since consciousness arose in me, is now inevitably not distant.'¹³⁶) Carlyle's contempt for physical and emotional 'dirt', which can be read as forming part of Burke's aesthetic subjection of 'beauty' to 'sublime' and of 'love' to 'power' (since, in Burke's words, 'love approaches much nearer to contempt than is commonly imagined'¹³⁷) is what we arguably also see at play in *The French Revolution*. The Revolution is admirable in as much as it is an expression of sublime strength. Carlyle's soundproof attic can also be seen as a means of isolating himself from the plight of the poor. In 1838 Edward Strachey notes Carlyle's impressions of the political and social unrest in Britain during a time when he used to hear the poor man working till late at night with the weaving loom (we are reminded again of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, 'the tailor retailored' symbolising the revolutionary atmosphere in Britain):

In one place [...] he used to hear a loom at work till twelve o'clock at night, and [...] before seven in the morning [...] he was told there was a weaver next door,—a man with a wife and six children,—earning six shillings a week by his seventeen hours of daily work. [...] They are desperate men, who say it is better to shoot or be shot than to endure this any longer; and, says Carlyle, 'we shall soon have insurrections, and these poor creatures must be put down by the sabre and the gallows, and then perhaps thinking men will be roused to seek for a remedy.'¹³⁸

¹³³ *CL* 6:243-244.

¹³⁴ 'I hear the Disease is fast abating. It is likely enough to come and go among us; to take up its dwelling with us among our other maladies. The sooner we grow to compose ourselves beside it, the wiser for us. A man who has reconciled himself to die need not go distracted at the manner of his death.' *CL* 6:243-244.

¹³⁵ *CL* 15: 218-221.

¹³⁶ *CL* 28:178-179.

¹³⁷ Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: J. Dodsley, 1767), p. 116.

¹³⁸ *CL* 10:198-203. 'He observed that the Duke of Buccleuch has about fifty thousand men working for him, and giving up to him two thirds of the fruit of their labors; and yet it never occurs to him (though he is by no means a bad man) that he has any duties to perform to any one of this multitude. They may live on their six shillings a week, while he imports his cartloads of foxes from Ireland as the best mode of employing his great wealth.' (E. Strachey)

John Schad has drawn attention to Carlyle's 'spiritual elitism' and his rejection of the body.¹³⁹ Although Carlyle's treatment of the body is often more nuanced in *The French Revolution*, his later writings seem to confirm Carlyle's obsession with the filth and ugliness of the body. Both in 'Modern Prisons' and *Chartism* Carlyle depicts the Irish nation and the Chartists in distorted animal forms. In the former text, Carlyle gives full vent to his disgust:

Miserable distorted blockheads, the generality; ape-faces, imp-faces, angry dog-faces, heavy sullen ox-faces; degraded underfoot perverse creatures, sons of indocility, greedy mutinous darkness, and in one word, of STUPIDITY, which is the general mother of such.¹⁴⁰

In *Chartism*, he compares the Irish to vermin and pestilence, and subsequently to apes:

The time has come when the Irish population must either be improved a little, or else exterminated. [...] We have quarantines against pestilence; but there is no pestilence like that; and against it what quarantine is possible? He too may be ignorant; but he has not sunk from decent manhood to squalid apehood: he cannot continue there. American forests lie untilled across the ocean; the uncivilised Irishman, not by his strength but by the opposite of strength, drives out the Saxon native, takes possession in his room.¹⁴¹

In the *Latter Day Pamphlets* Carlyle's admiration for the pristine clean prison, which he presents as the 'Oasis of Purity', is in striking contrast with his physical disgust at the prisoners:

For all round this beautiful Establishment, or Oasis of Purity, intended for the Devil's regiments of the line, lay continents of dingy poor and dirty dwellings, where the unfortunate not yet enlisted into that Force were struggling manifoldly, [...] to keep the Devil out-of-doors, and not enlist with him. And it was by a tax on these that the Barracks for the regiments of the line were kept up.¹⁴²

The physicality of the prisoners becomes so oppressive that the text does not seem to move beyond Carlyle's disgust. In accordance with Burke's theory of the sublime, which states that 'terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not

¹³⁹ Cf. John Schad, *Writing the Bodies of Christ* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 118-125.

¹⁴⁰ *Works* 20:55. Compare also Carlyle's obsessively close depiction of the faces of the prisoners: 'Chartist Notability First struck me very much; I had seen him about a year before, by involuntary accident and much to my disgust, magnetizing a silly young person; and had noted well the unlovely voracious look of him, his thick oily skin, his heavy dull-burning eyes, his greedy mouth, the dusky potent insatiable animalism that looked out of every feature of him.' *Works* 20:53.

¹⁴¹ *Works* 29:28.

¹⁴² *Works* 20:58.

press too closely',¹⁴³ Carlyle's sublime depiction of the mob in *French Revolution* gives way here to sheer abhorrence of human body.

Whereas in these later works, Carlyle becomes increasingly uncritical (there is no rational comment in *The Latter Day Pamphlets*, because the text seems to revolve around its obsessive aesthetics), *The French Revolution* is a text which reflects critically on both Britain's and Carlyle's own mythical constructs. It is also a text that ultimately resists all attempts at its purification from its complex mythical texture. Mary Desaulniers's sophisticated study of Carlyle's Gothic imagery sees Carlyle as seeking to replace the (Gothic) 'economy of terror' with an 'economy of event', through an artistic fiat. However, the artistic pact between the reader and the writer, which Desaulniers proposes, as we have already seen, is highly problematic because of Carlyle's complex perception of human imagination:

If reading is an act of community, its redemptive value lies in what Carlyle perceives to be the distinction between a brotherhood of contractual obligation and one of prophetic literacy. [...] The brotherhood of literacy emerges in *The French Revolution* as a form of reader-author symbiosis. [...] Author and reader participate in a brotherhood of spirit when both [...] read in the event not only a sick French king but an ailing 'French Kingship.'¹⁴⁴

I would argue that, in a movement mastered in *Sartor*, the text proposes to the reader a faulty deal, reminiscent of Stanley Fish's Satan.¹⁴⁵ Although the author and the reader sometimes appear to be sublimely removed from the revolutionary text, they ultimately inhabit the fallen texture of the revolutionary world, which is replenished with multiple voices and echoes. To this mass of textual interpretations, they are invited to add their own understanding, however, with little hope of extricating themselves altogether from the multivocality of the text. This is both the curse and the (deconstructive) joy of the text, which seems to delight in the multiple gossipy versions of the events in a clear challenge to the domineering nineteenth-century Whig idea of a privileged, objective voice of the historian. John Wilson's first impression of *The French Revolution* in his review for the *Blackwood's Magazine* is that Carlyle's history singlehandedly dismisses 'ignorance and incapacity of all other historians.'¹⁴⁶ However, we could argue that

¹⁴³ Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁴ Desaulniers, p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

¹⁴⁶ John Wilson, *op. cit.*

Carlyle's own interpretation of the events, being no more than 'a history' among others (as inscribed in the full title: *The French Revolution: A History*) has no claims to being the ultimate version either.

Following Jürgen Habermas's thought we could say that all myths call for reflection and open space for a dialogue. Habermas's theory is particularly helpful in seeing the place of rational critique in Carlyle's project. What Habermas's mature philosophy proposes is a vision of the public space of interrogation, in which members of various (religious and secular) communities take turns to enter consciously into the worldviews of other parties, instead of rejecting them as simply foreign to their personal perspective. Habermas's reinvestigation of the Enlightenment vision of rationality broadens the reason's capacity of negotiating between diverse viewpoints. The 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*), the cultural domain of one community becomes problematised and questioned through an opening to other disputants' cultural perspectives:

The more the worldview that furnishes the cultural stock of knowledge is decentred, the less the need for understanding is covered *in advance* by an interpreted lifeworld immune from critique, and the more this need has to be met by the interpretive accomplishments of the participants themselves.¹⁴⁷

According to Habermas, travel between various perspectives is possible, because the speakers of one cultural language are capable of translating their positions into other cultural idioms. Habermas, who via his dialogue-mediated vision of human communion is answering the experience of the Second World War, to a certain extent inhabits a similar historical and moral terrain that Carlyle does in answering the post-revolutionary scenery, in which the language of progress, according to Carlyle, is no longer a viable one.¹⁴⁸

A call for the reinvestigation of the received British constructs, such as utilitarianism and progressivism and for the invention of a new spiritual language, which will be capable of mediating the supernatural for the nineteenth-century reader is also registered by Carlyle's contemporary, John Henry Newman (from an Anglican, and subsequently Catholic position). Newman is another author who shares with Carlyle the

¹⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 70.

¹⁴⁸ Whereas Habermas's critical viewpoint is post-Kantian rationalism, Carlyle's chosen *Lebenswelt* in *The French Revolution* is, I have argued, Scottish Calvinism (enriched by the Scottish Enlightenment tradition).

opinion that Britain has become too uncritical and unreflective in its national and religious myths (something which becomes the main theme of his own life leading him on a journey from Anglicanism to Catholicism as presented in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864)):

[H]owever plausible, however distinct, however complete the national view of this or that matter may be, it does not follow that it is not a mere illusion, if it has not been duly measured with other views of the same matter. No conclusion is trustworthy which has not been tried by enemy as well as friend; no traditions have a claim upon us which shrink from criticism, and dare not look a rival in the face.¹⁴⁹

He also criticises the Whig model of an ‘objective historian’ and, specifically, the ‘philosophical views of history’, which he sees as deeply personal stories founded on the authors’ convictions (first principles) and drawing from their life experience:

This is especially the case in what are called philosophical views of history. [...] I do not call Gibbon merely ingenious; still his account of the rise of Christianity is the mere subjective view of one who could not enter into its depth and power. [...] The aspect under which we view things is often intensely personal; nay, even awfully so, considering that, from the nature of the case, it does not bring home its idiosyncrasy either to ourselves or to others. Each of us looks at the world in his own way, and does not know that perhaps it is characteristically his own.¹⁵⁰

The siege of the Bastille is an example of Carlyle’s chosen mode of description in which the reader is invited to assume in turns diverse perspectives from which to contemplate the developing events, rather than sharing in one objective viewpoint. Carlyle’s artistic rendition is a theatrical re-enactment of the event, rather, than a historical portrayal. Carlyle reserves for his epic depiction a deliberately inconspicuous place about three-fourths of the first part of *The French Revolution*, in the middle of the chapter. Suddenly placed *in medias res*, the reader is almost likely to miss altogether the

¹⁴⁹ Newman, ‘Present Position of Catholics in England Addressed to the Brothers of the Oratory’ (London: Burns & Lambert, 1851), p. 9.

¹⁵⁰ Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 361. Newman is also another author who is looking to negotiate a new critical space between the Tory and Whig agendas, or, in Newman’s vocabulary, a place between the liberal reading of religion and the ‘thorough-going Toryism.’ In describing the liberal movement in *Apologia Neman* says: ‘In their day they [liberals] did little more than take credit to themselves for enlightened views, largeness of mind, liberality of sentiment, without drawing the line between what was just and what was inadmissible in speculation, and without seeing the tendency of their own principles; and engrossing, as they did, the mental energy of the University, they met for a time with no effectual hindrance to the spread of their influence, except (what indeed at the moment was most effectual, but not of an intellectual character) the thorough-going Toryism and traditionary Church-of-England-ism of the great body of the Colleges and Convocation.’ Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1892), p. 289.

most symbolically charged event of the Revolution (this is in tune with Carlyle's conviction that prevalent narrations of history are often a question of an accident or a personal choice). Carlyle introduces the scene as a 'confusion as of Babel; noise as of the Crack of Doom',¹⁵¹ which subsequently becomes the poetical theme that Carlyle develops in composing the scene. From the first sentence, the confusion seems to affect the author to the extent that he is apparently not able to find proper words: 'To describe this Siege of the Bastille (thought to be one of the most important in history) perhaps transcends the talent of mortals.'¹⁵² The exaggeration expresses Carlyle's gentle irony and bathos. The amount of exulted and symbolically charged political and national accounts of the taking of the Bastille appears to have removed it too far from reality to be examined in a serious historical manner. The author and the readers are invited to make their way through the overgrowth of myths and textual constructs of the event, which ultimately eludes all depiction (because it has been symbolically overdetermined). In accordance with this insight, the subsequent depiction, far from clarifying historical events, becomes increasingly confusing and impossibly complicated. The tower of the Bastille itself is presented as a labyrinthine, and almost indescribable building: 'Could one but, after infinite reading, get to understand so much as the plan of the building!'.¹⁵³ Carlyle pretends to describe the Bastille's construction in great detail by enumerating the multiple parts of the tower, which creates a greater impression of chaos and mystery: 'there is open Esplanade, at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine; there are such Forecourts, Cour Avance, Cour de l'Orme, arched Gateway (where Louis Tournay now fights); then new drawbridges, dormant-bridges, rampart-bastions, and the grim Eight Towers.'¹⁵⁴ Half-way through the account, Carlyle suddenly gives up the description and, using personification, puns on the attacking masses which seem to give a new life to the Bastille. The Bastille now becomes 'a labyrinthic Mass, high-frowning there, of all ages from twenty years to four hundred and twenty;—beleaguered, in this its last hour, as we said, by mere Chaos come again!'¹⁵⁵ While the Bastille becomes personified, the revolutionary masses also take their character from the chaotic and labyrinthine nature of the Bastille in this mirror-like depiction.

¹⁵¹ *FR* 1:192.

¹⁵² *FR* 1:191.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Not only the author and the characters become deeply entangled in the revolutionary chaos, the reader appears to become mingled with the revolutionary crowd as well. Carlyle's dramatic and unexpected switch to 'we' from third person description takes the readers by surprise:

Upwards from the Esplanade, horizontally from all neighbouring roofs and windows, flashes one irregular deluge of musketry,—without effect. The Invalides lie flat, firing comparatively at their ease from behind stone; hardly through portholes, shew the tip of a nose. We fall, shot; and make no impression!¹⁵⁶

The readers here inadvertently become collaborators in the revolutionary struggle and are even invited to share the doubts, questions and insights on how to destroy the Bastille. This is achieved through active present tense description, broken narration, quick and unfinished sentences, all of which mimic the confused voices of the attackers:

Blood flows, the aliment of new madness. The wounded are carried into houses of the Rue Cerisaie; the dying leave their last mandate not to yield till the accursed Stronghold fall. And yet, alas, how fall? The walls are so thick!¹⁵⁷

The readers observe the events partly through the eyes of the crowd, partly from the perspective of the eternity, of which the old Bastille clock reminds them constantly. In the middle of the revolutionary struggle and noise, Carlyle pauses in order to eavesdrop on the sound of the great clock located at the very heart of the events, within the tower of the Bastille, symbolically staging the mingling of the two planes of time and space, divine and human. The eternal and the temporary are not only juxtaposed, but also intimately connected in an enigmatic and unobvious way. The Bastille clock not only measures the actual time in which the events take place, but also symbolically refers to the eternal. The eternal perspective, although unperceived (inaudible) by the revolutionaries themselves, rather than being removed from the temporal one, is already present at the very heart of the Bastille and the revolutionary struggle:

How the great Bastille Clock ticks (inaudible) in its Inner Court there, at its ease, hour after hour; as if nothing special, for it or the world, were passing! It tolled One when the firing began; and is now pointing towards Five, and still the firing slakes not.—Far down, in their vaults, the seven

¹⁵⁶ *FR* 1:192.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Prisoners hear muffled din as of earthquakes; their Turnkeys answer vaguely.¹⁵⁸

This mysterious, timeless vision is particularly apposite, since, as a collaborator in the siege, the reader partakes in the sublime, veiled and unclear vision of the events, which appear to be almost otherworldly and supernatural. Carlyle's creative use of punctuation and imagery of the shoreless sea which overflows all boundaries means that the authorial voice becomes so entangled with the voices of the mob that it is no longer clear who it is that utters the comments, asks the questions and shouts the confused commands. In the last sentences, the mob's shouts give way to the author's exalted voice, half-prophesying future events, then, changing his mind and theatrically dropping the curtain over the future:

Wo to thee, de Launay, with thy poor hundred Invalides! Broglie is distant, and his ears heavy: Besenval hears, but can send no help. One poor troop of Hussars has crept, reconnoitring, cautiously along the Quais, as far as the Pont Neuf. 'We are come to join you,' said the Captain; for the crowd seems shoreless. A large-headed dwarfish individual, of smoke-bleared aspect, shambles forward, opening his blue lips, for there is sense in him; and croaks: 'Alight then, and give up your arms!' the Hussar-Captain is too happy to be escorted to the Barriers, and dismissed on parole. Who the squat individual was? Men answer, it is M. Marat, author of the excellent pacific *Avis au Peuple!* Great truly, O thou remarkable Dogleech, is this thy day of emergence and new birth: and yet this same day come four years—!—But let the curtains of the future hang.¹⁵⁹

The ghostly and almost otherworldly dwarfish figure of Marat, who enters the scene without being introduced or recognised amid the curious questions about his person, exemplifies Carlyle's technique of allowing the reader to experience the tumult, doubts and uncertainties of the revolutionaries. In Carlyle's rendition, history is happening here and now in front of the reader's (and the revolutionaries') astonished eyes. The biblical style, broken sentences and creative, 'rebellious' punctuation serve to focus on the artistic fiat which Carlyle stages, forcing the readers to forget about the historical, national and cultural constructions with which they approach the text. It is up to the readers to decipher the confused and multi-layered meaning of the events and come up with their own interpretation, while the narrator's voice appears to become mixed with

¹⁵⁸ *FR* 1:193.

¹⁵⁹ *FR* 1:193-4.

the disordered perceptions of the actors past and present in the common experience of reading events which do not fit any absolute historical narrative.

In the middle of the attack, Carlyle shifts the perspective again to that of de Launay, the commander of the garrison that defended the Bastille. This provides for another striking contrast. From the outer tumult of the mixed cries of the gathering masses, the reader is taken suddenly straight into what seems to be de Launay's stream-of-consciousness and invited to share the thoughts and doubts of de Launay. De Launay's agitated mind produces a long chain of feverish plans and questions which spring backwards and forwards to the point of becoming almost unintelligible. Carlyle's method of repeating rumour and false prophecies in *The French Revolution* becomes the highlight of de Launay's confused state of mind in which in a single and seemingly never-ending sentence he replays his earlier feverish designs and plans of blowing up the Bastille rather than surrendering it. In Carlyle's portrayal, de Launay's thoughts become so blended with reality that the author already sees him 'like old Roman Senator, or bronze Lamp-holder' lighting a taper and bringing it close to the powder magazine. Caught within de Launay's imaginative perception, we find it almost impossible to distinguish between de Launay's agitated thoughts and his actions. In contrast to the distinctly deterministic depiction of the voting over the king's death, which we glimpsed earlier, here each of de Launay's feverish thoughts teems with endless possibilities and, in the author's keen and sympathetic imagination, shoots into different directions, thereby creating new historical patterns and endless possibilities. Carlyle brings de Launay's unrealised plans to life by taking note of all that 'could, might, would, or should' have happened. The broken sentences and creative use of a mixture of French vocabulary and English neologisms are ingenious experiments in the linguistic presentation of de Launay's character and his restless state of mind. An onomatopoeic mixture of French vocabulary and King James's Bible English, such as we see in his exclamation: 'ye brawling *canaille*' (the rabble) (in which the reader can literally hear de Launay's Old Testamental rage), and instanced also in de Launay's determination to let 'all the tagrag-and-bobtail of the world [...] work their will', are both examples not only of Carlyle's linguistic capability but also brilliant little psychological sketches achieved via a couple of apparently random and disconnected sentences. Although we are not provided with much information about de Launay prior to the scene, we leave after two short paragraphs with a deep sympathetic insight into his character. What Carlyle's fantastic depiction also achieves is a state of

indecisiveness, in which it seems that anything is possible. At the end of Carlyle's depiction, when de Launay curses the attacking mob and ponders on 'how will it be when a whole Bastille springs skyward!', we are almost convinced that through the strange confusion of various tenses, between what 'could, might, would, or should' have happened, despite all our knowledge to the contrary, the Bastille is already destroyed:

What shall de Launay do? One thing only de Launay could have done: what he said he would do. Fancy him sitting, from the first, with lighted taper, within arm's length of the Powder-Magazine; motionless, like old Roman Senator, or bronze Lamp-holder; coldly apprising Thuriot, and all men, by a slight motion of his eye, what his resolution was:—Harmless he sat there, while unharmed; but the King's Fortress, meanwhile, could, might, would, or should, in nowise, be surrendered, save to the King's Messenger: one old man's life worthless, so it be lost with honour; but think, ye brawling *canaille*, how will it be when a whole Bastille springs skyward!—In such statuesque, taper-holding attitude, one fancies de Launay might have left Thuriot, the red Clerks of the Bazoche, Cure of Saint-Stephen and all the tagrag-and-bobtail of the world, to work their will.¹⁶⁰

It is only in the following paragraph that we are sharply called back from the realm of de Launay's ideas to reality, when we learn that the Bastille, despite all this fantastic narration, has not been destroyed: 'And yet, withal, he could not do it.' De Launay's rage now suddenly abates and gives way to a slow movement of abstract reflection, carried as though on another symbolic plan (earlier suggested by the 'eternal' ticking of the Bastille clock, unheard by the attacking mob). In a frozen moment, we almost see de Launay standing with his lit taper leaning over the powder magazine and mediating to the reader what seem to be no longer his own thoughts, but rather Carlyle's philosophical reflections on the Revolution. In tune with the whole scene created by Carlyle, even the enemy of the Revolution, the guardian of the Bastille, is not able to resist the revolutionary cry. We possibly see Carlyle play again on the association of the masses with the Catholic Mass in their (Eucharistic) cry for bread and the assertion that nobody can be indifferent in face of human suffering: 'He who can resist that, has his footing some where beyond Time.' Given Carlyle's and the reader's own 'prophetic stances' beyond the revolutionary tumult and, in a sense, beyond the revolutionary time, this is a double-edged assertion, which we have already seen in Carlyle's treatment of the revolutionaries. All physical and emotional removal from the world is deeply

¹⁶⁰ *FR* 1:194.

suspicious in Carlyle's perspective. Whereas here Carlyle is keen to merge the revolutionary and the 'prophetic' times and lead a dialogue with the past, he elsewhere eagerly withdraws from the physical and temporal reality of the revolution and slips into a sublime 'indifferent' and, as we have already glanced, Mephistophelian position 'beyond Time.' We also see here the contrast which Carlyle creates between the rationally thinking de Launay and the crowd, which supposedly acts purely upon its instincts.

The passage reads as a dialogue between de Launay's thoughts and the author's explicit interpretation, or perhaps even examination of de Launay's conscience, which leads Carlyle to draw conclusions about his possible motives of behaviour. In an interesting framing structure, de Launay's thoughts begin the paragraph and end it, whereas in between the two Carlyle inserts his questions to the reader while he tries to account for de Launay's final decision. In this bizarre mixture of the author's and de Launay's thoughts and doubts, it almost seems that it is Carlyle's voice which helps de Launay make his final decision. Rather than a logical thought-sequence, as before, de Launay's imaginative perception draws from his sympathetic and personal response to the events:

And yet, withal, he could not do it. Hast thou considered how each man's heart is so tremulously responsive to the hearts of all men; hast thou noted how omnipotent is the very sound of many men? How their shriek of indignation palsies the strong soul; their howl of contumely withers with unfelt pangs? The Ritter Gluck confessed that the ground-tone of the noblest passage, in one of his noblest Operas, was the voice of the Populace he had heard at Vienna, crying to their Kaiser: Bread! Bread! Great is the combined voice of men; the utterance of their instincts, which are truer than their thoughts: it is the greatest a man encounters, among the sounds and shadows, which make up this World of Time. He who can resist that, has his footing some where beyond Time. De Launay could not do it.¹⁶¹

Carlyle's portrayal of Charlotte Corday, the assassin of Marat, is another example of Carlyle's innovative style of narration. Like de Lunay, Charlotte is character whose mind the reader is allowed to read only partly and imperfectly, while her inner motives of action remain veiled in mystery. Imperfect and corrupt perception is the hallmark of Carlyle's portraying technique in *The French Revolution*. As in the Bastille scene, also here Carlyle appears suddenly and almost accidentally to spot the figure of

¹⁶¹ FR 1:194-5.

Charlotte amidst the historical tumult. Changing from the large-scale portrayal of the agitated state of France submerged in federalist revolts; he focuses very closely on her figure. Charlotte's story reads like a criminal tale, in which the reader is invited to take the role of an August Dupin detective, attempting to read the mind of the character. Similarly to the scene of the siege of Bastille, the reader is submerged in Charlotte's story *in medias res*, without any explanations. In place of an introduction, all that we are given are apparently haphazard guesses and observations from the author who appears to know as little about Charlotte as if he had just seen her for the first time. At first, we only see Charlotte's physical features:

Amid which dim ferment of Caen and the World, History specially notices one thing: in the lobby of the Mansion de l'Intendance, where busy Deputies are coming and going, a young Lady with an aged valet, taking grave graceful leave of Deputy Barbaroux. [...] She is of stately Norman figure; in her twenty-fifth year; of beautiful still countenance: her name is Charlotte Corday, heretofore styled d'Armans, while Nobility still was.¹⁶²

Then, we receive broken pieces of information and quotes for which Carlyle does not care to provide any references, giving the impression that he is among the people inquiring after Charlotte and obtaining only uncertain gossip, partly from the guesses and thoughts of the contemporary historical characters that see her, partly from the textual construction of her character by historians and biographers. By so placing both the eyewitnesses, historical texts and memoirs on the same level, Carlyle again foregrounds the myth-mediated nature of all perception. The readers encounter themselves in a strange *physical*, yet at the same time distinctly *textual* presence of Charlotte. The impression that Carlyle creates (in tune with his vision of history as a palimpsest) is that of standing amidst a number of *voices* or *texts* which over the years have accumulated around Charlotte's person and now come to life again through the experience of this creative reading of history which we share with the narrator. The Whig construct of the 'pure' historical narrative *vis-a-vis* Charlotte's inscrutable and inexplicable personality is only one faulty myth among others. We cannot be sure of Charlotte's personal motifs, neither do we know the motifs of those who describe her. The author's own 'prophetic' depiction of Charlotte as 'a Star; cruel-lovely, with half-angelic, half-demonic splendour' is little more than his poetical impression and sign of his apparent lack of any concrete knowledge of her person as a human being. The

¹⁶² FR 3:166.

sublime language is here distinctly associated with the narrator's lack of knowledge and his elusive sublimation of Charlotte's character as a consequence of this. Even the reports of Charlotte's physical presence are mediated by gossip and uncertain: 'A completeness, a decision is in this fair female Figure.' Amidst all narratives of her person, Charlotte remains a mystery:

Barbaroux has given her a Note to Deputy Duperret,—him who once drew his sword in the effervescence. Apparently she will to Paris on some errand? 'She was a Republican before the Revolution, and never wanted energy.' A completeness, a decision is in this fair female Figure: 'by energy she means the spirit that will prompt one to sacrifice himself for his country.' What if she, this fair young Charlotte, had emerged from her secluded stillness, suddenly like a Star; cruel-lovely, with half-angelic, half-demonic splendour; to gleam for a moment, and in a moment be extinguished: to be held in memory, so bright complete was she, through long centuries!¹⁶³

It is this last narratorial glimpse into the future which, in a mysterious poetical causal structure, appears to set Charlotte on her course of action. The narrator follows Charlotte's steps both in the guise of a curious stalker and a detective, attempting to guess the character of her mission through broken and overheard sentences which she utters:

On the morrow morning, she delivers her Note to Duperret. [...] this then was Charlotte's errand to Paris? She has finished this, in the course of Friday;—yet says nothing of returning. [...] About eight on the Saturday morning, she purchases a large sheath-knife in the Palais Royal; then straightway, in the Place des Victoires, takes a hackney-coach: 'To the Rue de l'Ecole de Medecine, No. 44.' It is the residence of the Citoyen Marat!—The Citoyen Marat is ill, and cannot be seen; which seems to disappoint her much. Her business is with Marat, then?¹⁶⁴

What Carlyle achieves via this detective-like technique is to create a sense of suspense and imminent danger, which closely imitate and poetically prepare the reader for the shocking and unexpected scene of Marat's murder. The detailed information mirrors a police report which would have been made after the crime. Carlyle seems to be suggesting that all history writing is essentially like a detective's investigation which often cannot ascertain the complex and multiple causes of events and that simple answers to who-did-it are far from satisfying. Instead of a logical cause and effect narrative, we are provided with scraps of information about Charlotte's history taken

¹⁶³ *FR* 3:167.

¹⁶⁴ *FR* 3:167-8.

from uncertain sources. The suspect stalking of Charlotte's character poses further questions about the narrator's police-like character and his own (and the readers) motives in following Charlotte's scandalous story. Through the voyeuristic depiction of Marat's death, the reader and the narrator seem to become inadvertently implicated in the murder.

In the depiction of Marat's assassination, Carlyle breaks all possible rules of historical detachment and balanced description, such as presented in Macaulay's and in the Whig historical agenda. The passage reads like a parody of Macaulay's aversion to Homer's 'uneducated' and dialogue-mediated mode of narration. A mixture of broken dialogue, unfinished and crude pieces of description and bathetic commentary are all a challenge to the Whig idea of polished and detached historical narrative. In Carlyle's understanding, human history is more mysterious, strange, surprising and often bluntly ridiculous than Macaulay's desire for clean moral lessons would allow him to admit. The almost complete lack of description and swift flow of action nearly transform the scene into a dramatic piece. By juxtaposing Marat's words and narratorial description of them as the croaking of a frog ("Their heads shall fall within a fortnight," croaks the eager People's-Friend') Carlyle manages to convey a masterfully ironic portrayal of Marat's oxymoronic 'philanthropic' creed. The mighty 'Friend of the People', revolutionary leader, Marat, is here given the comical depiction of an ugly toad in its bath. Carlyle comments bathetically after Marat's death: 'there is no Friend of the People, or Friend of the Washerwoman, left', satirising again Marat's fanatical, abstract and unrealistic revolutionary creed, and bringing it down to a personal and common-sense level:

—Hark, a rap again! [...] Citoyen Marat, I am from Caen the seat of rebellion, and wished to speak with you.—Be seated, *mon enfant*. Now what are the Traitors doing at Caen? What Deputies are at Caen?—Charlotte names some Deputies. "Their heads shall fall within a fortnight," croaks the eager People's-Friend, clutching his tablets to write: *Barbaroux, Pétion*, writes he with bare shrunk arm, turning aside in the bath: Petion, and Louvet, and—Charlotte has drawn her knife from the sheath; plunges it, with one sure stroke, into the writer's heart. "A *moi, chère amie*, Help, dear!" No more could the Death-choked say or shriek. The helpful Washerwoman running in, there is no Friend of the People, or Friend of the Washerwoman, left; but his life with a groan gushes out, indignant, to the shades below. [...] And so Marat People's-Friend is

ended; the lone Stylites has got hurled down suddenly from his Pillar,—
whither He that made him does know.¹⁶⁵

Writing in 1904, Vernon Lee aptly links Carlyle's use of the present tense in this passage to his 'timeless' perspective. Carlyle's present tense, Lee says, is 'the tense of eternal verities, which from their very nature, have not *been*, but, like all divine things, always *are*.'¹⁶⁶ In order to make the point, Lee conducts an experiment in translating Charlotte's story from its prophetic present (which he names 'the lyric of prophecy'), to an orthodox historical past tense. The translation renders the passage at best ungrammatical, at worst unintelligible. Lee notes that Carlyle's use of the present tense not only channels the deeply personal perspective of Carlyle's narrative, but it also allows him to formulate large generations which are impossible to render in the past tense. If we were to be more adventurous and consider this perspective on a theological plane, Carlyle's prophetic viewpoint becomes even more original and unorthodox. In an orthodox Calvinist view, history is the unfolding of God's predestined and linearly written manuscript. However, Carlyle's narrative style seems to suggest a divine viewpoint of endless possibilities, in which things are glimpsed over into the future without depriving the agents of the acting potential and freedom. What is more, the potential but not realised plans and ideas seem to be treasured and to live mysteriously their own lives, and become shortly actualised through the author's and reader's active meditating upon them, as we saw in the case of the Bastille, where de Launay's unrealised thoughts seemed to become an alternative reality in the act of a meditative re-staging of them by the reader. If we were to take seriously the construction of *The French Revolution* on the model of a Catholic mass (following Carlyle's sketch of the text in 'The Diamond Necklace') and his association of the masses with the Eucharistic mass, then the repeated 'miserere' and the insistent (somewhat melodramatic) calls to the reader to pray for each of the characters in the context of the references to the masses for the dead (*Tenebris Masses*) suggests a vision of the *French Revolution* reminiscent of Dante's *Purgatory*. Since it is only in 'Purgatory' (not in 'Hell') that Dante's characters ask for mercy and prayer, the reader's active meditation (prayer) on the characters he meets through the narrative can be read as mediating grace to them.

¹⁶⁵ *FR* 3:169.

¹⁶⁶ Vernon Lee, 'Studies in Literary Psychology III. Carlyle and the Present Tense', 85 (1904), pp. 386-92, in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, p. 69.

Lee further demonstrates that by translating Carlyle's narrative into the past, the cause and effect logic of the sequence is lost. However, we could go further and claim that in Carlyle's history there is very little of the Whig type of emphasis on causality. As in the case of the story of Charlotte Corday, the death of Marat comes *unexpectedly* and *against all calculations*. This creativeness and endless potentiality of history is what in Derrida's language is *The French Revolution's* hidden textual joy, which has largely been underestimated by the reading of *The French Revolution's* artistic confusion as a major *fault* in Carlyle's writing rather than as an innovative and creative artistic tool.¹⁶⁷

In order to savour the full potential of Carlyle's historical agenda in which unpredictability and absurdity of history play major parts, let us compare Carlyle's depiction of the Corpus-Christi procession passing the streets of Paris, which is defended by the authority of the National Guards, with the same image in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) closely modelled on Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Carlyle's depiction is full of paradoxes:

Also, in these same days, it is lamentable to see how National Guards, escorting Fete Dieu or Corpus-Christi ceremonial, do collar and smite down any Patriot that does not uncover as the Hostie passes. They clap their bayonets to the breast of Cattle-butcher Legendre, a known Patriot ever since the Bastille days; and threaten to butcher him; though he sat quite respectfully, he says, in his Gig, at a distance of fifty paces, waiting till the thing were by. Nay, orthodox females were shrieking to have down the Lanterne on him.¹⁶⁸

Carlyle delights in catching absurd scenes like this one in which the National Guards, together with the pious 'orthodox females' gathered in the Catholic procession of Corpus Christi, demand the execution of the famous Revolutionary punishment upon the well-known Revolutionary hero, Louis Legendre, the leader of the storming of the Bastille, because he had not cared to remove his hat when the Corpus Christi procession passed him. Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, closely modelled on Carlyle's depiction, portrays Catholic monks as the anti-heroes, delighting in the torture of the innocent and lacks altogether Carlyle's stress on the absurd and accidental character of history. There is no doubt in Dickens's Gothic depiction about who are the villains of the story:

¹⁶⁷ Cf. David R. Sorensen on 'Carlyle's confused philosophy of history'. Sorensen claims that "Carlyle traps himself in his own contradictions". 'Carlyle's Method of History in *The French Revolution*', in D. J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr, p. 87.

¹⁶⁸ *FR* 2:255.

France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, making paper money and spending it. Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honour to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards.¹⁶⁹

A juxtaposition of the scene called ‘Insurrection of Women’ in Carlyle’s rendition with Mignet’s depiction of the same scene is equally striking. Carlyle quotes, imitates and joins in the voices of the marching women, encouraging them to attack, and almost literally leading the attack undertaken as though in absence of men. The narrator’s voice seems to either disappear among the dramatic shouts of the revolutionaries, or to join them in disordered cries: ‘descend, ye Judiths, to food and revenge!’ As in the portrayal of the taking of the Bastille, we see here Carlyle’s use of a dramatic almost to the point of being ungrammatical language in which both tenses and pronouns become mixed and confused so that the revolutionary actors, the author and the reader inadvertently become the co-operators in revolutionary action:

O we unhappy women! [...] *Allons!* Let us assemble. To the Hotel-de-Ville; to Versailles; to the Lanterne! In one of the Guardhouses of the Quartier Saint-Eustache, ‘a young woman’ seizes a drum,—for how shall National Guards give fire on women, on a young woman? The young woman seizes the drum; sets forth, beating it, ‘uttering cries relative to the dearth of grains.’ Descend, O mothers; descend, ye Judiths, to food and revenge!—All women gather and go; crowds storm all stairs, force out all women: the female Insurrectionary Force, according to Camille, resembles the English Naval one; there is a universal ‘Press of women.’ Robust Dames of the Halle, slim Mantua-makers, assiduous, risen with the dawn; ancient Virginity tripping to matins; the Housemaid, with early broom; all must go. Rouse ye, O women; the laggard men will not act; they say, we ourselves may act!¹⁷⁰

By comparison, Mignet’s depiction, although rendered in the present tense as well, and using the biblical imagery that Carlyle borrows and applies to the description of the attacking women in his narrative, is distinctly emotionally, temporarily and spatially removed from the author and reader. It is only ‘a picture interesting to paint’, which the readers are invited to admire from the distance, as though it were a curious painting in a museum:

¹⁶⁹ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ *FR* 1:252.

It is a picture interesting to paint, and one of the greatest in the Revolution, this same army of ten-thousand Judiths setting forth to cut-off the head of Holofernes; forcing the Hotel-de-Ville; arming themselves with whatever they can lay hands on; some trying ropes to the cannon-trains, arresting carts, loading them with artillery, with powder and balls for the Versailles National Guard, which is left without ammunition; others driving-on the horses, or seated on cannon, holding the redoubtable match; seeking for their generalissimo, not aristocrats with epaulettes, but Conquerors of the Bastille!¹⁷¹

In this chapter we have traced the development of Carlyle's vision of history in juxtaposition with the Whig historical model. In what follows, we will examine Mill's reading of *The French Revolution* and mark the main points of disagreement between Mill's and Carlyle's historical agendas.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in *CME* 4:129.

Chapter 7: 'This is not *right* Radicalism': Carlyle and John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill's presentation of *The French Revolution* as the new epic poem of the nineteenth century in his book review published in July 1837¹ (only two months after the publication of *The French Revolution*) has become one of the watchwords in Carlylean criticism directly or indirectly inspiring, among others, such readings as A. J. LaValley's *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern* (1968) and John Rosenberg's *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (1985), as well as Mark Cumming's *Disimprisoned Epic*. Following Mill's presentation, Carlyle's Romantic credentials and the role played by sympathetic imagination in his poetic presentation of the Revolution have been duly acknowledged and examined.² However, what still requires much closer reading is the political character of Mill's depiction. By the time he published his review, Mill had already begun to become deeply estranged not only personally from Carlyle and his worldview but also from his own early fascination with the French Revolution and its ethos of the agency of the nation in changing the political and social conditions (which Mill originally saw as a direct inspiration for the British radical movement). According to J. Coleman, Mill was so utterly disillusioned by the aftermath of the July Revolution in France that his attitude at the time was self-avowedly 'anti-democratic':

In the aftermath of the July Revolution, John Mill was a disillusioned man. Neither the Benthamite radicalism of his youth, nor the French Model of popular democracy could, he concluded, provide conditions conducive to the moral improvement of mankind. By mid-decade, decentralised American democracy was to replace France as Mill's radical paradigm, but in the early 1830s an essentially non-democratic elitism pervaded his thought. In 1842 he was to frankly admit that his opinions during this period had been 'anti-democratic,' and at the time he confessed to being 'sick of politics'; he also, as we have seen, confessed to being sick of the French Revolution.³

Mill continued writing on the July Revolution and pouring out his bitter disenchantment in the *Examiner* in the early 1830s. His enthusiasm was gone, while his early romantic notions about the 'common people' changed radically in the wake of the July

¹ 'Carlyle's *French Revolution*', in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 20, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 133-167.

² Cf., for example, Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

³ J. Coleman, 'John Stuart Mill on the French Revolution', *John Stuart Mill: Critical Assessments*, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1988), 335-350 (p. 348).

Revolution. Mill's article for the *Examiner* written in 1830 can be seen as an expression of his early romantic construction the French revolutionaries:

Never since the beginning of the world was there seen in a people such a heroic, such an unconquerable attachment to justice. The poorest of the populace, with arms in their hands, were absolutely masters of Paris and all that it contains, not a man went richer to his home that night.⁴

Mill's visit in Paris in August 1830 with his friends George Graham and John Arthur Roebuck provided him with ample material for his letters to James Mill, in which he gives full vent to his utopian vision of the French working classes and of what he portrays as his newly gained insight into human nature:

The inconceivable purity and singleness of purpose, almost amounting to *naïveté*, which they all shew in speaking of these events, has given me a greater love for them than I thought myself capable of feeling for so large a collection of human beings, and the more exhilarating views which it opens of human nature will have a beneficial effect on the whole of my future life.⁵

Mill's romantic depiction of the revolutionaries and their supposed gentleness and nobleness of nature can be seen to reflect the Whig myth of the British nation as a non-violent and 'naturally' gentle and 'civilised' people. In this idiom, Mill depicts in admiration the non-violent and revenge-free conduct of the July Revolutionaries and their great respect for property, all fundamental values in the conservative British mentality. A curious example of this mythology is Mill's approving description of the case where 'One man was shot by his comrades for stealing a melon', which supposedly gives credit to French moral discipline, respect for property and inherently good nature:

In the midst of their highest excitation, in the moment of victory, surrounded by their dead and wounded brothers, fathers, aye, and children and wives and mothers - these men, these ignorant, despised, and long-abused people shrunk from all unnecessary carnage - the moment resistance ceased, that moment they abstained from assault [...]. Surrounded by every temptation that perfect licence could offer, not one excess was committed. Vast treasures passed through their hands untouched, and signal punishment was immediately the lot of any one who for one instant departed from the strictest honesty and decorum.

⁴ Mill, 'Attempt to Save the Ex-Ministers', *Examiner* (1830), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, p. 167.

⁵ *Ibid.* vol. 20, p. lvii.

(One man was shot by his comrades for stealing a melon.) These men were actually starving, and yet they would take no recompense.⁶

The degree to which Mill mediates for Carlyle the early enthusiasm and admiration for the Revolution is hard to overstate. In *The French Revolution* Carlyle can be seen to translate and transpose the specific imagery used by Mill in his accounts from his visit to France in 1830 onto the scenes of the first Revolution. This is instanced in Carlyle's version of Mill's sentimentalised depiction in the narrative, which presents the celebrations taking place in the Field of Mars. Mill's romantic scene is here infused with his later disillusionment, as well as with Carlyle's own suspicion towards Mill's utopian language:

Thus too a certain person (of some quality, or private capital, to appearance), entering hastily, flings down his coat, waistcoat and two watches, and is rushing to the thick of the work: 'But your watches?' cries the general voice.—'Does one distrust his brothers?' answers he; nor were the watches stolen. How beautiful is noble-sentiment: like gossamer gauze, beautiful and cheap; which will stand no tear and wear! Beautiful cheap gossamer gauze, thou film-shadow of a raw-material of Virtue, which art not woven, nor likely to be, into Duty; thou art better than nothing, and also worse!⁷

Already in 1831 Mill gives expression to his changing attitude towards the agency of the people in politics and towards the French revolutionaries:

The will of the majority is not to be obeyed as a law, but it is to be attended to as a fact: the opinions and feelings of the nation are entitled to consideration, not for their own sake, but as one of the circumstances of the times [...].⁸

In a letter to Stirling from 1831, Mill writes, revoking his earlier optimistic view of human nature:

Liberalism [...] is for making every man his own guide & sovereign master, & letting him think for himself & do exactly as he judges best for himself. [...] It is difficult to conceive a more thorough ignorance of man's nature, & of what is necessary for his happiness or what degree of happiness & virtue he is capable of attaining than this system implies."⁹

⁶ F. E. Mineka, 'John Stuart Mill: Letters on the French Revolution of 1830', *Victorian Studies*, 1:2 (1957), 136-154 (p. 147).

⁷ *FR* 2:59.

⁸ 'The Peerage Question in France', *Examiner* (1831), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 23, ed. Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson, 341-5 (p. 342).

⁹ *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18, p. xiii.

In 1831 Mill does not hide his contempt for the ‘backwardness of her [France’s] national mind’, and in his later writings refers to the French ‘character’ as ‘excitable’ and unstable, which ‘accordingly alternates between resentment against England and Anglomania.’¹⁰ To Gustave d’Eichthal, Mill reveals his English bias and paternalistic attitude towards the French: ‘It is impossible not to love the French people & at the same time not to admit that they are children— whereas with us even children are care-hardened men of fifty. It is as I have long thought a clear case for the *croisement des races*.’¹¹ From 1833 Mill’s disappointment with French politics begins to change into a more defined Burkean horror at the succeeding scenes: ‘we almost doubt whether the scenes that are unfolded took place in a civilized country.’¹²

Within this context, Coleman contends that in his review, which guaranteed the success of *The French Revolution*,

Mill is at pains to distance himself from Carlyle by guardedly criticizing the other’s apparent disregard of logic and philosophic principles. This article is significant, not only as a postscript to Mill’s infatuation with the French Revolution, but also, along with the essays on Bentham (1838) and Coleridge (1840), as an initial statement of his mature thought.¹³

Coleman argues that the review can be read as ‘an act of goodwill, a compensatory gesture at the close of what had been an intimate friendship.’¹⁴ This can perhaps explain why we only get a very short glimpse of Mill’s moral and institutional progressivism in his mild criticism of Carlyle’s ‘tendency [...] to undervalue general principles’ and ‘to set too low a value on what constitutions and forms of governments can do.’¹⁵ Apart

¹⁰ *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, p. lvi: ‘The French Chambers were prorogued on the 21st of April, after a session of nine months, in which but little that is of any real use has been even talked about; and of that little, nothing but the most paltry and insignificant fraction has been accomplished. The first session of the first Parliament elected under the Citizen King and the charte-vérité, has demonstrated nothing but the vices of the institutions of France, and the backwardness of her national mind.’

¹¹ *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 20, p. xxii.

¹² *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, p. lxii. Compare Mill’s annoyance with French politics in his series in the *Examiner*: ‘We have discontinued of late our usual notices of French affairs, because all which has been doing in that country is so paltry.’ ‘French News’, *Examiner* (1833), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 23, 560-572 (p.560). And: ‘What then has the Session produced? Produced! It has produced money. Its results are the vote of an enormous budget, and an endless series of extraordinary votes of credit.’ *Ibid.*, p. 570.

¹³ Coleman, *John Stuart Mill: Critical Assessments*, p. 350.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ ‘Carlyle’s *French Revolution*’, p. 162.

from this vague reference to Mill's political philosophy, Mill's review avoids any direct confrontation with Carlyle's interpretation of the Revolution.¹⁶

Mill had further reasons to distance himself from Carlyle's politics. In the same year, he had already been criticised for the publication of Carlyle's 'Mirabeau' and 'The Parliamentary History of the French Revolution' in *The Westminster Review* of which he was the principal editor. As we shall see, both of these texts which express Carlyle's belief in a strong spiritual reformer (as he presented Mirabeau) on the one hand, and represent the French people as a positive and politically valid voice in the history of the Revolution, could hardly be further from the political line of Mill's periodical in 1837. Mill's decision to represent Carlyle as an apolitical writer whose 'epic poem' is conveniently removed from the political realities of contemporary Europe (and Britain) should be seen as a deliberate move and possibly a means of defending Carlyle from the already resentful readers of *The Westminster Review*. Carlyle's political misfit in Mill's journal can be arguably gauged from Mill's insistence on Carlyle's political neutrality and indeed on his supposed lack of any concrete political opinions. Mill proposes to his readers that they should disregard completely 'the opinions of the writer' and focus instead on the 'poetical' character of Carlyle's sympathetic and supposedly politically-neutral view of all the actors of the Revolution, a surprisingly lukewarm appreciation of the work, which Mill strives to compensate through an exuberant praise of Carlyle's artistic skills. What Mill in fact appears to be saying is that Carlyle's work either lacks any (political) message or that Carlyle's worldview is altogether uninteresting to the contemporary reader:

And what (it may be asked) are Mr. Carlyle's opinions?
If this means, whether is he Tory, Whig, or Democrat; is he for things as they are, or for things nearly as they are; or is he one who thinks that subverting things as they are, and setting up Democracy is the main thing needful? we answer, he is none of all these. We should say that he has appropriated and made part of his own frame of thought, nearly all that is good in all these several modes of thinking. But it may be asked, what opinion has Mr. Carlyle formed of the French Revolution, as an event in

¹⁶ Clare A. Simmons argues that Mill's depiction of *The French Revolution* as an epic poem expresses Mill's disagreement with Carlyle's politics and philosophy: 'The "epic" label, indeed, becomes more suspect in association with Mill. Mill could respond to the aesthetics of his friend's book and describe it as "epic"; he was less comfortable in exploring the philosophical implications of its vision of history and politics. Indeed, Mill's deflection of attention from philosophy of history to literary genre may be in part explained by his realisation of the substantial differences between Carlyle's sense of history and his.' Clare A. Simmons, *Eyes Across the Channel: French Revolutions, Party History and British Writing, 1830-1882* (Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 83.

universal history; and this question is entitled to an answer. It should be, however, premised, that in a history upon the plan of Mr. Carlyle's, the opinions of the writer are a matter of secondary importance.¹⁷

Mill links the lack of commitment to any of the leading political parties to Carlyle's supposed lack of a politically valid critical voice. This supposed political neutrality is immediately translated by Mill into the (Whig) newspeak of the historian's 'sympathy' with all French revolutionary actors. This 'sympathy' must be understood within the political grammar of the changing Whig depiction of the Revolution. Whereas until late 1820s Whigs do not use the sublime in connection with the Revolution, this changes with Macaulay's reinterpretation of the Revolution in his essay, 'Milton', published in *The Edinburgh Review* (1825), which was read by Carlyle with interest.¹⁸ Macaulay first praises Milton as a poet, according to the already examined definition of poetry as apolitical, only to dedicate the second part of the essay to Milton's 'public conduct': 'The public conduct of Milton must be approved or condemned, according as the resistance of the people to Charles the First shall appear to be justifiable or criminal.'¹⁹ According to Macaulay, Milton's political views are justifiable only as an expression of the conviction that for the sake of maintaining a patriotic myth of liberty it was necessary to present all British past actions as justified and morally acceptable. This position includes not only the Glorious Revolution but also the English Civil War and the execution of king Charles I:

But, though we think the conduct of the regicides blameable, that of Milton appears to us in a very different light. The deed was done. It could not be undone. The evil was incurred; and the object was to render it as small as possible. We censure the chiefs of the army for not yielding to the popular opinion: but we cannot censure Milton for wishing to change that opinion. The very feeling which would have restrained us from committing the act, would have led us, after it had been committed, to defend it against the ravings of servility and superstition. For the sake of public liberty, we wish that the thing had not been done, while the people disapproved of it. But, for the sake of public liberty, we should also have wished the people to approve of it when it was done.²⁰

What we have here is a glimpse into the Whig historical paradigm, according to which history must be shaped and reconstructed in a way that suits the myth of progressive

¹⁷ Mill, 'Carlyle's *French Revolution*', pp. 157-8.

¹⁸ *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, p. 300.

¹⁹ Macaulay, 'Milton', in *Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay, Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review*, 5th ed. in 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), 1-62 (pp. 31-2).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

civilisation and liberty in Britain (modelled on Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). That is the reason why Macaulay's praise of non-violence is then (rather violently) replaced by his political agenda. Significantly for our study, Macaulay's move allows him to translate this perspective into the imagery of the Revolution in France, by associating Puritans with Girondins, and presenting both as the bearers of the language of the sublime and as 'passionate worshippers of freedom'.²¹ This move is supposedly justified by Macaulay through the rule that all past must be sublimated in order to fit the 'progressive' pattern of historical development:

On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they [Puritans] looked down with contempt: For they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand. The very meanest of them was a being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged — on whose slightest action the Spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest, who had been destined, before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a felicity which should continue when heaven and earth should have passed away.²²

The sublime language allows Macaulay to associate Puritans with the French Girondins, also known as Brissotins. Again, this must be read not only or principally as Macaulay's approval of the Gironde, but rather in accordance with his historical agenda, which states that the French Revolution, similarly to the English Civil War, now that both are seen as a necessary evil on the path of progress, must be aesthetically sublimated:

Heated by the study of ancient literature, they [Puritans] set up their country as their idol, and proposed to themselves the heroes of Plutarch as their examples. They seem to have borne some resemblance to the Brissotines of the French Revolution.²³

The Girondins, whom Carlyle associates alternatively with the Whigs and English radicals, are also Mill's favourite heroes of the Revolution, whom he saw as the bearers of the language of democracy and French revolutionary ideals.²⁴ Although Macaulay's historical agenda is contrary to Carlyle, his application of the sublime language to the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

²⁴ 'In his *Autobiography* Mill acknowledged the extent to which the French Revolution, and even an English reworking of it, had played upon his youthful imagination: 'I learnt with astonishment, that the principles of democracy [...] had borne all before them in France thirty years earlier [...] What happened so lately seemed as if it might easily happen again; and the most transcendent glory I was capable of conceiving, was that of figuring, successful or unsuccessful, as a Girondist in an English Convention.' Michael Levin, *Mill on Civilisation and Barbarism* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 5.

Girondins can be read as allowing Carlyle to broaden the sublime reference further to the Jacobins.

The sympathetic and apolitical stance which Carlyle supposedly demonstrates in *The French Revolution*, according to Mill, has since become an assumption frequently made about *The French Revolution*. Ben Israel's statement that

Carlyle was so lacking in an obvious political standpoint that from his day to this critics have attributed to his book all the colours of the political rainbow. He has been called the author of Communism, of Fascism, of the British Labour Movement, a Liberal, a Conservative, etc.²⁵

is followed by his appreciation of Carlyle's 'Shakespearean sympathy' in drawing his characters, which supposedly leaves his work politically indifferent. Carlyle's Romantic vision of history is described as

a search for a historical truth which is achieved by an historian who abandons himself to the impact of as much reality as he can find, bringing to it nothing from outside, least of all a pattern of politics.²⁶

The reference to Shakespeare in Macaulay's essay (as well as in Mill's review, as we shall see²⁷) is supposedly given to prove the lack of influence of the poet's moral, philosophical and political opinions on his writing. In Macaulay's theory, poetry is a 'pre-civilisational', and therefore, supposedly, a pre-moral enterprise, which cannot be judged:

He may believe in a moral sense, like Shaftesbury. He may refer all human actions to self-interest, like Hevetius, or he may never think about the matter at all. His creed on such subjects will no more influence his poetry, properly so called, than the notions which a painter may have conceived respecting the lacrymal glands [...] If Shakespeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by no means certain that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have contained half so much able reasoning on the subject as is to be found in the Fable of the Bees.²⁸

²⁵ Ben-Israel, p. 122.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁷ 'In Shakespeare, consequently, we feel we are in a world of realities; we are among such beings as really could exist, as do exist, or have existed, and as we can sympathise with; the faces we see around us are human faces, and not mere rudiments of such, or exaggerations of single features. This quality, so often pointed out as distinctive of Shakespeare's plays, distinguishes Mr. Carlyle's history.' 'Carlyle's *French Revolution*', p. 135.

²⁸ Macaulay, 'Milton', p. 7.

Whereas Ben-Israel sees this lack of political critique as an asset in Carlyle's work in comparison with the explicitly Tory or Whig-modelled versions of the history of the Revolution in the 1830s during the British Reform debate, H. D. Traill reads Carlyle's sympathy as an *antidote* to his misguided political and religious views:

Carlyle, however, like many another preacher of his nationality, was far more charitable than his preachments. That is to say, he comes into far closer contact with the realities of life, and, in judging men's actions, approaches much nearer to that standard of the all-comprehending which is the all-forgiving when he descends from the pulpit. Once he has descended, the rich humanity of the man and his Shakespearean breadth of sympathy assert themselves; he forgets his Radical or Tory-Radical crotchets, his Puritan prejudices; and the partisans of either cause, the lofty and the base alike, take life upon his pages, portrayed for us not only with a touch of magic but with a just and equal hand.²⁹

Carlyle's 'humanity' can supposedly only be revealed at the price of discarding his Calvinist and political opinions. Traill's appreciation can also be seen to follow the portrayal of Carlyle drawn by Leigh Hunt (1784 – 1859), who looked hopefully towards Carlyle as 'the new Shelley', until he was disappointed to find out that Carlyle was 'a most iron Presbyterian fellow', and subsequently depicted him in his *Autobiography* as 'one of the kindest and best of men, betrayed by an obsolete, life-denying Protestantism.'³⁰

Also in Mill's review, Carlyle's 'Shakespearean sympathy' can be seen as Mill's way of dealing with Carlyle's uncomfortable political, moral and religious views. Whereas it has been my contention that in a crucial sense *The French Revolution* is a text which stages a dispute between Carlyle's Calvinistic creed and Mill's progressivism, from Mill's panegyric Carlyle emerges as lukewarm and idealistic philanthropist (possibly a representative of Mill's 'Religion of Humanity') whose poetics are unnaturally removed from the historical realities:

A deep catholic sympathy with human nature, with all natural human feelings, looks out from every page of these volumes; justice administered in love, to all kind of human beings, bad and good; the most earnest exalted feeling of moral distinctions, with the most generous allowances for whatever partial confounding of these distinctions, either natural weakness or perverse circumstances can excuse. No greatness, no

²⁹ H. D. Traill, 'Introduction', *FR* 1, p. xvi.

³⁰ *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, ed. Mark Cumming (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), pp. 230-232.

strength, no goodness or lovingness, passes unrecognized or unhonoured by him.³¹

Whereas in his earlier writings, Mill draws a programme of inventing a new *poetical* language for the depiction of the French Revolution, in this description he gets close to the nineteenth-century Whig agenda, which disconnects politics sharply from poetry and contrasts the ‘civilised’ *political* present with the ‘savage’ *poetical* past. Mill’s depiction of *the French Revolution* as a modern epic poem fits perfectly into the Whig theory of poetry. In ‘Milton’ Macaulay writes:

We think that, as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. [...] Nations, like individuals, first perceive, and then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of an enlightened society is philosophical, that of a half-civilized people is poetical. [...] But analysis is not the business of the poet. His office is to portray, not to dissect.³²

Carlyle’s depiction of Revolutionary France can be read in line with Macaulay’s historical theory (inspired by Rousseau) as a return to the ‘pre-political’, that is *uncivilised* state of writing. Poetic depiction supposedly removes the reader from the realistic representation into the realm of deception, because it produces images upon the mind that contaminate the pure flow of the writer’s abstract reasoning, which should remain unmediated through image:

Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body. And, as the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry effects its purpose most completely in a dark age. As the light of knowledge breaks in upon its exhibitions, as the outlines of certainty become more and more definite, and the shades of probability more and more distinct, the hues and lineaments of the phantoms which it calls up grow fainter and fainter. We cannot unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.³³

Poetry is here seen as the domain of delusion and, in Whig theory, of the supposedly irrational ‘Dark Ages’. Assimilated to deception, poetry quite simply can never depict reality faithfully. Besides from its arguable incompatibility with Macaulay’s aesthetical ideal, the Whig definition of human rationality as devoid of symbolic representation is radically questioned in *The French Revolution* through the idea of ‘pure reason’, the

³¹ Mill, ‘Carlyle’s *French Revolution*’, p. 163.

³² Macaulay, ‘Milton’, p. 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9

fundament of the Robespierre's ideology, which in the reign of terror gives rise to most exuberant and irrational phantasms. Macaulay's paradigm is also rooted in Gibbon's portrayal of civilisational progress as a purification of the medieval 'extravagant tales, which display fiction, without the genius, of poetry'.³⁴

Poets, according to Macaulay, require 'a certain unsoundness of mind' in order to be able to believe in their own delusions. The delusiveness of poetry is located in the domain of imagination and the poet's ability to use it is considered by Macaulay not only as a sign of irrationality and immaturity, but also of mental instability and inability to think on an abstract level:

After the first suppositions have been made, every thing ought to be consistent; but those first suppositions require a degree of credulity which almost amounts to a partial and temporary derangement of the intellect. Hence of all people children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. Every image which is strongly presented to their mental eye produces on them the effect of reality.³⁵

Whereas Mill is apparently willing to accept Carlyle's presentation of the Jacobins in *The French Revolution* as a flamboyant example of his poetical skill, Herman Merivale is far more critical. In Merivale's opinion, although the 'poetical' quality of Carlyle's text might be seen to expiate some of his historical sins, this does by no means obfuscate the fact that Carlyle's choice of the 'shallow Girondins and worthless Jacobins' for his main heroes is both artistically and politically unacceptable. Both are, in Merivale's opinion, unworthy bearers of Carlyle's sublime tongue:

The men of the Revolution are the prominent objects of his portraiture [...] the 'men of the Revolution' are, after all, so uninteresting a race, and it is [...] impossible to make heroes of them, whether for purposes of history or romance. [...] Mr Carlyle, therefore, assuredly deserves some honour as an artist, if not as a faithful interpreter of the past, for having contrived to make something of such unpromising materials. [...] [H]e has contrived to throw a sort of lustre even over the shallow Girondins and worthless Jacobins, with whom his history chiefly deals.³⁶

Mill's own journey from encouraging Carlyle's poetical style of history to its dismissal in his later progressive view of history, can be seen as reflecting Mill's loss of belief in human conscience and his increasingly pessimistic outlook on morality. Mill's

³⁴ Gibbon, p. 769.

³⁵ Macaulay, 'Milton', p. 8.

³⁶ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', p. 418.

early Romantic attitude can be glanced in his ‘Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties’ (1833), where he presents the epic style of writing as best suited to the depiction of grand historical scenes. However, already in ‘Michelet’s History of France’ (1844) Mill presents Carlyle’s poetical style as inferior to ‘scientific’ ideal history, which he now endorses. *The French Revolution* is situated by Mill tellingly in the second stage of the development of historical narrative: ‘reproduction of past events in the colours of life, and with all the complexity and bustle of a real scene, can hardly be carried to a higher pitch than by Mr. Carlyle.’³⁷ It is the third, ‘scientific’ stage of historical development, however, which is seen to be capable of identifying the historical patterns and, on the basis of them, predicting the future:

There is yet a third, and the highest stage of historical investigation, in which the aim is [...] to construct a science of history. In this view [...] All history is conceived as a progressive chain of causes and effects; [...] That these states must follow one another according to some law, is considered certain: how to read that law, is deemed the fundamental problem of the science of history. To find on what principles, derived from the nature of man and the laws of the outward world, each state of society and of the human mind produced that which came after it [...] is the aim of historical philosophy in its third stage.³⁸

No longer a grand, epic event in human history which requires poetical and imaginative investment on the part of the historian, the French Revolution becomes in Mill’s thought an event which is subsumed within the ideology of progress, and which must be read according to the logic of causes and effects identified by the historian. In this context, Carlyle’s oeuvre is no more than an impressive work of fiction which fails to fulfil Mill’s requirements of historical philosophy. Most importantly, it does not reveal the ‘historical laws’ which allow for the reading of the future (an idea, which Carlyle’s textual model of history, of course, rejects as utterly unrealistic). Significantly, in the third, scientific stage of history, Carlyle’s Christianity is no longer the welcome guest that it was in Mill’s poetical idiom of historical depiction. Mill already tells Carlyle in a letter written in 1833 that the main obstacle he sees in writing about the French Revolution in Britain is the impossibility of removing Christian culture from any historical narrative of the Revolution. Mill foresees

³⁷ Mill, ‘Michelet’s History of France’, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 20, 219-255 (p. 225).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

the difficulty of [writing upon the Revolution] tolerably [...] [and the] far greater difficulty of doing it so as to be read in England, until the time comes when one can speak of Christianity as it may be spoken of in France; as by far the greatest and best thing which has existed on this globe, but which is gone, never to return, only what was best in it to reappear in another and still higher form, some time (heaven knows when).³⁹

By 1840s, not only religion but also poetry has no longer a legitimate place in Mill's historiographic model. John C. Cairns draws attention to the radical change in Mill's attitude towards the Revolution between 1830 and 1833:

Mill's own interest in the Revolution had altered: it was no longer the storehouse of wisdom for the radical reform movement, but an integral part of, a critical episode in, the development of civilisation toward the understanding of which he and others were only beginning to move.⁴⁰

Mill's depiction of Carlyle's poetics in 1837, therefore, places *The French Revolution* in the inferior, 'poetical' stage of history, which Mill sees as distinctly anachronistic. This is the main reason why Carlyle's text, according to Mill, is ultimately devoid of any political or moral message for the contemporary reader.

Carlyle's presentation of the French nation as a historical agent (something that Carlyle borrowed most directly from Madame de Staël's *Considerations on the French Revolution*), is acceptable to Mill only as a poetical expression of the author's profound feeling. Significantly, Carlyle himself in the early stages of writing in 1834 describes his work as 'an Epic Poem of the Revolution: an Apotheosis of Sansculottism!'.⁴¹ In his review of *The French Revolution*, Mill echoes the first part of Carlyle's description, but tellingly omits the second one. By depicting Carlyle's style as full of 'a fervour and exaltation of feeling which is only tolerated in verse, if even there',⁴² Mill again implicitly questions Carlyle's perspective. He specifically quotes the scene of the taking of the Bastille in which Carlyle casts the Revolutionary mob in sublime language. Mill implicitly criticises Carlyle's heroic presentation of the revolutionaries (despite his statement that *The French Revolution* is 'the truest of histories'), which is only acceptable if we perceive Carlyle's work as a 'poetical' depiction.

³⁹ Letter to Carlyle, (5 Oct., 1833), quoted in: *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 20, p. xxxi.

⁴⁰ John C. Cairns, 'Introduction', *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 20, p. xxxii.

⁴¹ *CL* 7:301-309.

⁴² 'Carlyle's *French Revolution*', pp. 164-5.

Mill is arguably doing all he can in order to present Carlyle as a ‘respectable’ figure in the radical *London and Westminster Review*, something that is apparent from the reactions that the publication of Carlyle’s previous texts provoked. Mill had already faced criticism from his readers as well as from Thomas Falconer (1805–82) (the co-editor and the brother-in-law of John Arthur Roebuck (1802–1879), also a contributor to *Westminster*)⁴³ for publishing Carlyle’s ‘Mirabeau’ (1837) and ‘Parliamentary History of the French Revolution’ (1837) earlier in the year.⁴⁴ Bossche remarks that the two areas of offence in Carlyle’s essays were Carlyle’s dislike for Benthamite utilitarianism and his extraordinary style.⁴⁵ In ‘Mirabeau’, Carlyle not only ridiculed Marquis Mirabeau’s studies in Political Economy (the fundamental creed of *The London and Westminster*), and his ‘idolatrous’ utilitarianism; he also provocatively cast the old Mirabeau symbolically in the role of a Presbyterian elder⁴⁶ and made sure to notice that Marquis Mirabeau remained true to his old faith: ‘The Marquis, though he knows the *Encyclopédie*, has not forgotten the higher Sacred Books, or that there is a God in this world.’⁴⁷ Carlyle also cast the young Mirabeau in the role of a Calvinist reformer who destroys the old (political and religious) formulas; and remains on the side of the suffering people. Yet, it was Mirabeau’s belief demonstrated in his *Memoirs* that ‘the people which complains is always in the right’ (a judgment on the French nation which Carlyle largely endorses in *The French Revolution*) which likely proved most provocative. Carlyle quotes Mirabeau:

[I]t is my belief that the people which complains is always in the right; that its indefatigable patience invariably waits the uttermost excesses of oppression, before it can determine on resisting; that it never resists long

⁴³ Falconer resigned after the April 1837 edition.

⁴⁴ Sarah Austin wrote to Mill about “Mirabeau” (March 3, 1837): “Mr Lewis & my husband are clamorous against poor Carlyle’s article & say you will ruin the review if you admit any more. I am afraid this is a very general opinion, though I grieve it should be so”. Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 381. Mill’s reply on 26 April, defending Carlyle: ‘A *propos* of your remark on Carlyle’s article Mirabeau: I am not at all surprised that Mr Austin or that Lewis should dislike it, but it has been the most popular article we ever had in the review & I think has been extremely useful to us. Except Roebuck, Grote, & Senior, I have met nobody here, of any account, who disliked it; & those three dislike everything, the *style* of which is not humdrum [...] Those who have disliked the article Mirabeau are those who cannot endure *any peculiarities* of style”. Mineka, 12: 333–34. Cf. also: Chris Vanden Bossche, ‘Introduction’, *Historical Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. iv. ‘Carlyle heard from Fraser that there was a ‘loud dissonance [...] about these two Papers’ [‘Mirabeau’ and ‘The Diamond Necklace’], and Mill assured him that ‘Mirabeau’ was doing a great service for the *London and Westminster*.’ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Bossche, ‘Introduction’, *Historical Essays*, p. iv.

⁴⁶ *CME* 4:83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

enough to obtain complete redress. [...] In all countries, in all times, aristocrats have implacably persecuted the people's friends.⁴⁸

Carlyle borrows the Romantic image of Mirabeau perhaps most directly from Madame de Staël's passionate depiction in the *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* (1800):⁴⁹

The eye that was once fixed on his countenance was not likely to be soon withdrawn: his immense head of hair distinguished him from amongst the rest, and suggested the idea that, like Samson, his strength depended on it; his countenance derived expression even from its ugliness; and his whole person conveyed the idea of irregular power, but still such power as we should expect to find in a tribune of the people.⁵⁰

Staël's portrayal of Mirabeau is directly linked to her passionate depiction of the French nation in the early stages of the Revolution, in which she took a personal interest through her father, Jacques Necker, the Director of Finance under King Louis XVI. Staël's presentation of the French nation united in a brotherly fight for freedom will become translated in *The French Revolution* into Carlyle's linguistic and poetical identification with the revolutionaries:

Multitudes of men of the same opinion embraced each other in the streets like brothers; and the army of the people of Paris, consisting of more than a hundred thousand men, was formed in an instant, as if by a miracle. The Bastille, that citadel of arbitrary power, was taken on the 14th of July, 1789.⁵¹

Staël's Romantic construction of the French nation had by 1830s become not only suspect, but unacceptable ('savage') language in Britain to the point that, as Mill senses, it is impossible to use it otherwise than *poetically* within the current cultural and political idiom.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴⁹ Carlyle was an admirer of Staël's *Allemagne* and dedicated to Staël a number of his early essays (Cf. 'Jean Paul Friedrich Richter's Review of Madame de Staël's *Allemagne*' (1830), 'Schiller, Goethe and Madame de Staël' (1832). He also studied Staël's *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* in preparation for *The French Revolution*: 'the French Revolution: of the French Revolution de Staël's *Allemagne*' (1830), our own shelves: Condorcet the French Revolution bring it in your pocket. I will also have de Staël's *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* vol. 1 (New York: James Eastburn, 1818), p. 109.

⁵⁰ Germaine de Staël, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* vol. 1 (New York: James Eastburn, 1818), p. 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140. Compare also: 'The 14th of July, although marked by bloody assassinations on the part of the populace, was yet a day of grandeur: the movement was national; no faction, either foreign or domestic, would have been able to excite such enthusiasm. All France participated in it, and the emotion of a whole people is always connected with true and natural feeling.' *Ibid.*, p.141.

In fact, Carlyle's presentation of Mirabeau as a defender of the people challenges both the Tory and the Whig depiction of Mirabeau. In 1832 Mirabeau was the Tories' hero presented by John Wilson Croker (1780–1857) in the *Quarterly Review* as the defender of Louis XVI and the only figure that could have checked the revolutionary violence and 'might have been successful in saving the monarchy.'⁵² The *Quarterly* builds the myth of Mirabeau as a strong leader who could have appeased the raging passions of the Jacobins and whose eyes were always set on the preservation of the monarchic order: 'Mirabeau could appreciate all that is good and pure, and [...] no one had a higher esteem for strong and virtuous characters.'⁵³ In Croker's depiction, Mirabeau remains safely disconnected from 'the lower orders', his main motivation all along being the reduction of courtly abuses and reestablishment of the king's authority. His strong opposition to the declaration of the rights of man is repeatedly emphasised. Unlike Carlyle's hero, who stands on the side of the people, Croker's Mirabeau is safely removed from the proceedings of the *mob*. The Women's March on Versailles on the night of the 5th of October 1789 can be seen as an example of this depiction. Croker presents it as a march of *savages*, of the 'lowest, most ignorant and most violent of the lower orders', from which Mirabeau remains dissociated:

A mob of the lowest, most ignorant and most violent of the lower orders of Paris, frantic with famine, and alarmed for the safety off the assembly and the Revolution by some imprudences of the court, executed a threat often previously made, and trooped down to Versailles. [...] some savages are reported to have attempted to massacre the royal family; two of the kings guards were brutally murdered; and the king finally yielded to the clamour of the mob, departed for Paris under circumstances of indignity [...] There was no sign of conspiracy or organization in the proceedings of the mob, and none of complicity in that of Mirabeau.⁵⁴

From the opposite (Whig) camp in the British Reform debate, came an article published the same year in *The Edinburgh Review* by Macaulay.⁵⁵ Macaulay inhabits a similarly condescending and Francophobic tone to Croker. Whereas in parliamentary debates with Croker, Macaulay argued (defending the National Assembly, seen as a French counterpart of the British Whigs in the debate over the Reform Bill) that it was

⁵² 'Souvenirs de Mirabeau, et sur les deux premieres Assemblies Legislatives par Etienne Dumont', *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1832), 228-248 (p. 246).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁵⁵ Macaulay, 'Souvenirs sur Mirabeau', *The Edinburgh Review*, 55:110 (1832), 552-576.

the aristocracy's resistance to reforms which triggered the revolutionary violence,⁵⁶ in 'Mirabeau' he argues that British people would do better to remain altogether ignorant of the wider European political context. 'Mirabeau' revolves around the supposed superiority of English politics over the 'wild' an unrealistic political aspirations of the French. While British reformers had always aimed to preserve the British ancient rights, Macaulay argues, the French 'hated the monarchy, the church, the nobility.'⁵⁷ English insularity and lack of interest in European politics, is seen by Macaulay as a salutary and *reasonable* position: '[An Englishman] is disposed to consider popular rights as the special heritage of the chosen race to which he belongs. He is inclined rather to repel than to encourage the alien proselyte who aspires to a share of his privileges.'⁵⁸ Within this line of argument, French democratic demands may be excused only in the light of their overall misjudgement of their situation: 'They had experienced so much evil from the sovereignty of kings, that they might be excused for lending a ready ear to those who preached, in an exaggerated form, the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people.'⁵⁹

Significantly, for Herman Merivale, Carlyle's depiction of Mirabeau in *The French Revolution* is also a Trojan horse for introducing a sublime depiction of the Jacobins. Similarly to Macaulay, Merivale argues that the National Assembly was the true agent in the transformation of France.⁶⁰ The supposedly practical common-sense voice of the National Assembly, seen as 'the administrative measures of practical men', is sharply juxtaposed with what Merivale sees as 'the explosions of popular madness' of the French nation (although we should bear in mind that despite this explicit admiration for the National Assembly, Merivale's one and only hero of the Revolution is Robespierre who is able to rule over the French mob). Following an established Whig reading, Merivale sees 'the destructive process' of the revolution as playing no important part in French history:

But Mr Carlyle is a hero-worshipper, and energy is with him the indispensable, nay the exclusive quality of heroism. [...] are the Mirabeaus and Dantons, and such as they, the products of the Revolution with which we are most concerned at the present day? Surely its essence was not in the exploits of the soldiers, the eloquence of tribunes, or the explosions of popular madness [...] Who are to be regarded as the agents

⁵⁶ Cf. Ben-Israel, pp.101-102.

⁵⁷ Macaulay, 'Mirabeau', p. 573.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

⁶⁰ Merivale, Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History'.

in the execution of this vast scheme? Not the popular champions and heroes [...] Their work was only in and about the preliminary or destructive process: that ended, their achievements remain but matter of curiosity and example. The work of reconstruction was going on in obscurity, in the assemblies, in committees, in the administrative measures of practical men [...] these are the men whom Mr Carlyle treats throughout with heroic contempt, as empty, sounding-bags, or mere laborious hammers of new formulas out of old.⁶¹

What we see here, perhaps more than anything else in Merivale's contempt for the 'explosions of popular madness', is again the identification of the true hero of Carlyle's work. It is ultimately not the presentation of Mirabeau as such that troubles Merivale, but Carlyle's depiction of him as a figure standing on the side of and representing the French people in the revolutionary struggle. Merivale's critique of Carlyle's hero-worship implicitly suggests that Carlyle chooses the wrong heroes for the Revolution (the revolutionary mob).

The July Revolution in France, as we have seen, also challenged dramatically Mill's early idealistic image of the heroic action of the united nation and triggered his fears of the rule of the mob, which, he now believed, could pose a threat to one's personal liberty. In 'Civilisation' (1836) Mill focuses on the diminishing control of the superior minds over the multitude:

The individual becomes so lost in the crowd, that though he depends more and more upon opinion, he is apt to depend less and less upon well-grounded opinion; upon the opinion of those who know him.⁶²

Mill expresses the same apprehensions over individual freedom being lost or dramatically curtailed in democracy, and of the loss of control of the 'superior' individuals over the masses:

When the masses become powerful, an individual, or a small band of individuals, can accomplish nothing considerable except by influencing the masses; and to do this becomes daily more difficult, from the constantly increasing number of those who are vying with one another to attract public attention.⁶³

⁶¹ Merivale, 'The French Revolution. A History', pp. 421-6.

⁶² Mill, 'Civilisation', in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18, 119-148 (p. 132).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 126. Compare also *On Liberty*, *Ibid.*, p. 268: 'At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world. The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organ of the tendencies and instincts of masses. This is as true in the moral and social relations of private life as in public transactions. Those whose opinions go by the name of public opinion, are not always the same sort of

The same type of fear is reflected in Mill's radical *Westminster Review*, which frequently echoes the language of Hannah Moore's programme of education of the lower classes. In a patronising fashion, James Mill in *The Westminster Review* insists on the necessity of the aristocratic leadership and education of the masses in the taste for 'cleanliness and neatness' and 'elegancies of life' (lower classes are implicitly both dirty and tasteless). The cultivation of 'beautiful feelings' (a language very reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's educational programme) is seen as a supposed cure to the brutal passions and *savagery* of the lower orders, which render the existence of the aristocratic, refined taste indispensable, and without which the society would become aesthetically 'coarse' and vulgar:

Besides this first and all-important effect, a class of men possessing leisure is absolutely necessary for cultivating the elegancies of life. This cannot be expected from men absorbed in the labours and cares of earning a subsistence. A society composed of such men would be necessarily coarse, and would have a tendency to grow more and more so: a taste even for cleanliness and neatness would be apt to be lost among them. But the laborious classes are prone to the imitation of those who are in circumstances above them; and when they see elegance, are fully capable of discerning its superiority to that which is coarse; they are refined by imitation.⁶⁴

Here, we see *The London and Westminster* share in the Whig aesthetic language of civilisational progress, according to which cultivated aesthetic taste is a requirement for the participation in political life. Lower orders of society, similarly to the Irish immigrants, are depicted explicitly as *savage*, and in need of being *civilised* through state help and subsistence in order to acquire 'the habits of civilised beings, instead of those of a race never yet thoroughly redeemed from the savage state.'⁶⁵ This is also John Arthur Roebuck's grammar in the *National Education* (1833), where he follows Malthus in advocating a *sane morality*, of which the main, and apparently only, tenet is sexual abstinence (something that can be seen as a response to Malthus's apocalyptic economical prophecies of the coming mass extinction through over-population):

public: in America they are the whole white population; in England, chiefly the middle class. But they are always a mass, that is to say, collective mediocrity. And what is a still greater novelty, the mass do not now take their opinions from dignitaries in Church or State, from ostensible leaders, or from books. Their thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspapers.'

⁶⁴ James Mill, 'Aristocracy', *The Westminster Review*, 2:4 (1836), p. 285.

⁶⁵ George J. Graham, 'Poor Laws in Ireland', *The Westminster Review*, 3:2 (1836), p. 334.

Let us illustrate this by a comparison: An Irish labourer is a being of few wants, and those wants are easily satisfied. What has been the result? — an improvidence actually unprecedented amid the annals of human thoughtlessness. He marries early, begets a large family, lives on a wretched diet of potatoes, dwells in a cabin inferior to an English pig-stye, is prone to sensual indulgences, and little anxious respecting the canons of a sane morality.⁶⁶

Carlyle's comment in a letter to Mill on the *National Education* is a comparison of Roebuck to Robespierre: 'I read Roebuck's Education in *Tait*: Roebuck has a conviction, a true one, but alm[ost] hopelessly mechanical and narrow; a lean, perseverant, unappeaseable nature; reminds me somewhat of Robespierre: he wins respect from me but not love, almost the reverse.'⁶⁷ This is a much revealing comparison which shows the fundamental line of disagreement between Carlyle's thought and the radicals from the circle of the *The Westminster Review*. Carlyle's critique of the shallowness of moral systems and politically-approved customs in *The French Revolution* as much as directed against Robespierre's dictatorship can also be read in this light as an indirect criticism of British 'philosophical-radicals' from Mill's circle.

In line with this Malthusian and *Anti-Jacobin* fear of the masses is Mill's decision to censure Carlyle's 'Parliamentary History of the French Revolution' by cutting from it the long quote from the 'Journal of the Jacobins' Debates', in which Carlyle represents the early British (Whig) enthusiasm for the Revolution. In a letter to his brother, Carlyle refers to Mill's (only major) change in the article:

Mill's Review, I suppose, is just coming out: he is printing that *Histoire Parlementaire* Article: I was treated again with a pleading, of extreme *maiserie*, in the name of Falconer the Editor's-Cloak and of Mill the Editor, about some citation concerning the Jacobins Society, 'to be left out or to be kept in.' I begged Mill, as a favour, to correct the whole thing with his own hand and never let me see it again till printed; which he is doing. I esteem his judgement in these things worth almost nothing. But he is very modest with it in my case; that also 'it is but fair to state.'⁶⁸

Carlyle's annoyance and disagreement with Mill's decision can be observed in the last two sentences. Mill's advice to Carlyle to remove the *sublime* depiction of the Jacobins

⁶⁶ John Arthur Roebuck, 'National Education', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1832), 755-765 (p. 758).

⁶⁷ *CL* 6:368-374.

⁶⁸ *CL* 9:171-177.

is, Carlyle sarcastically remarks in his letter, ‘worth almost nothing’. ‘It is but fair to state’, with which Carlyle ironically finishes the paragraph, was Jeffrey’s favourite phrase in *The Edinburgh Review*,⁶⁹ and, by applying it to Mill’s censorship, Carlyle places Mill alongside (Jeffrey’s) Whig political agenda. In the collected publication of his works, Carlyle recovered the whole passage cut out by Mill⁷⁰ and in a letter to Mill in October 1837, when deliberating on whether to continue to write for *The London and Westminster*, he explicitly referred to Mill’s censure of his works. He also implicitly criticised the ‘vociferous platitude’ of Mill’s periodical, signalling that he was not going to follow Mill’s line of radicalism and that he expected to be able to choose his own subjects:

My depth of Radicalism goes on without abatement; my aversion to Benthamism, to all Formulism, and indeed I am sorry to add to many hollow Formalists, with their barren jangling, their bigotry, vanity and ‘vociferous platitude,’ who call themselves Radicals, has sensibly increased on nearer acquaintance. Farther I should desire, indeed I should need, to have if not my own choice of subjects, yet something very [like] that; also I doubt if I could stand much editing!⁷¹

Throughout the 1830s Carlyle was in search of a new type of radicalism, as he confessed to Mill in 1837 referring to Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers*: ‘This is not *right* Radicalism yet; tho’ indeed what in the world is right! There is no right Radical in the company if it be not yourself, and perhaps still more *myself*.’⁷² Hill Shine notes that Carlyle, upon moving to London, began to set up his own little radical circle, which included Mill. Carlyle and Mill had found a common ‘radical’ political stance in their dislike of the Tory versions of French history as well as their common protest against Whig politics. Yet, Carlyle had been growing increasingly irritated by Mill’s philosophical and political agendas, which he had originally regarded as a challenge to the dominant political narration, but increasingly began to suspect of being in line with the Whig *mentalité*. Carlyle became increasingly estranged from Mill’s politics and the philosophical-radical circles (as the group of *The Westminster Review* came to be called due to their strong reliance on the utilitarian theories of Bentham, as well as Ricardo, Malthus and Harvey) in which Mill operated. In November he wrote to his brother:

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Works* 29:15-18.

⁷¹ *CL* 9:337-338.

⁷² *CL* 9:255-258.

After great soliciting on the one side, opposed by deep reluctance indifference and even disgust on the other, I about a week ago wrote to Mill asking How much he would give me for contributing to him for a year? [...] So I wait Mill's answer really *unbeschreiblich ruhig* [indescribably calm]. Radicalism, as professed by that set of men, does little but disgust me; vain jangling, godless selfconceit, the spirit of a most barren delusion.⁷³

Carlyle gradually grew to have a very low opinion of Mill's periodical. Already in a letter written in 1836 he compared 'the unfruitful rubbish-mound of Mill's Radicalism' to 'the fat glar [mud] of Fraser's Toryism.'⁷⁴ In a letter to Emerson he explicitly warned him against Mill's review:

As for Mill's *London Review* (for he is quasi-editor), I do not recommend it to you. Hidebound Radicalism; a to me well nigh insupportable thing! Open it not: a breath as of Sahara, and the Infinite Sterile, comes from every page of it.⁷⁵

The main cause of Carlyle's disappointment with Mill's review can be seen in his earlier letter written in 1836. In it Carlyle criticises Mill's favourite heroes of the French Revolution, the Girondins (whom Mill used to regard as the inspiration for the British radical movement), for their patronising way of speaking about the *masses*:

On the whole I am sick of the Girondins. To confess a truth, I find them extremely like our present set of respectable Radical members. There is the same cold clean-washed patronising talk about 'the masses' (a word, expressive of a thing, which I greatly hate); the same Formalism, hidebound Pedantry, superficiality, narrowness, barrenness. I find that the Mountain was perfectly under the necessity of flinging such a set of men to the Devil; whither also I doubt not our set will go, tho' I hope in a milder manner, our motion not being of that so extremely rapid kind.⁷⁶

We have also seen that Carlyle depicts the Girondins in *The French Revolution* in the same language which he uses for the depiction alternatively of British Whigs and radicals, stressing their common share of political grammar used in the depiction of the lower orders. Carlyle mockingly refers to both as 'respectable', that is, supporting the contemporary cultural and moral (but also political) currency. 'The respectable Radical'

⁷³ *CL* 9:339-344.

⁷⁴ *CL* 9:74-80.

⁷⁵ *CL* 9:80-85. Compare also Carlyle's letter to John A. Carlyle from 23 April 1837: 'The whole Radical fraternity, in fact, grow[s] insupportable to me. I have not seen even Buller these six months; and hardly ever tried except when a frank was not easily had elsewhere. They will go their way, thou goest thine.'
CL 9:186-192.

⁷⁶ *CL* 9:69-71.

is a fitting oxymoron which expresses Carlyle's satirising look on the political opposition in Britain, which, instead of challenging the ethos of the ruling order, in Carlyle's opinion, implicitly confirms it. In Carlyle's historical vision, the French (and British) radicals do not catch up with the profound historical changes which are taking place in front of their very eyes and apply an anachronistic language to social and political realities. Carlyle's wager in *The French Revolution* is to come up with a new parlance, capable of radically shaking the old linguistic formulas.

Carlyle's own references to *The French Revolution* in his letters provocatively challenge the language of the cultural and political establishment of the nineteenth century. Carlyle is consciously building up his own Romantic image of a wild Protestant Luther, whose book is destined to send to fire the contemporary 'respectable' notions. Mockingly imitating Jeffrey's Whig language (the balanced expression: 'on a general view'), which Carlyle finds to be comically inadequate to the dramatic historical events taking place in Europe, Carlyle writes in a letter to his brother, John:

I find 'on a general view' that the Book is one of the savagest written for several centuries: it is a Book written by a wild man, a man disunited from the fellowship of the world he lives in; looking King and beggar in the face with an indifference of brotherhood, an indifference of contempt,—that is really very extraordinary in a Respectable country.⁷⁷

The language of brotherhood, which, as we have seen, Carlyle borrows directly from Mme de Staël's imagery and which he broadens here (drawing primarily from the Christian idea of the common brotherhood of all humanity) to include the British readers is presented as a challenge to the 'respectable' established British political tongue. Carlyle's repeated insistence on the 'savagery' of his work should not be read merely as romantic extravagance, but also as a political move which questions the British language of civilisation and cultural superiority over France (and challenges Jeffrey's scarce opinion of Carlyle's Calvinism).

⁷⁷ *CL* 9:142-150. Compare also Carlyle's letter to John Sterling from 17 January 1837: 'It is a thing disgusting to me by the faults of it; the merits of which, for it is not without merits, will not be seen for a long time. It is a wild savage Book, itself a kind of French Revolution;—which perhaps, if Providence have so ordered it, the world had better not accept when offered it? With all my heart! What I do know of it is that it has come hot out of my own soul; born in blackness whirlwind and sorrow; that no man, for a long while, has stood speaking so completely alone under the Eternal Azure, in the character of man only; or is likely for a long while so to stand.' *CL* 9:115-120.

In a letter to Emerson, Carlyle again mocks the Whiggish reviewing style of a ‘good boy’ when he describes his work in a puerile language as ‘a wild savage ruleless very bad Book’:

As to the Book, I do say seriously that it is a wild savage ruleless very bad Book; which even you will not be able to like; much less any other man. Yet it contains strange things; sincerities drawn out of the heart of a man very strangely situated; reverent of nothing but what is reverable in all ages and places: so we will print it, and be done with it;—and try a new turn next time.—⁷⁸

We see here Carlyle using Burke’s conservative language of reverence juxtaposed with the savageness of the Revolution, rightly judged by Carlyle to be an explosive mixture in nineteenth-century Britain. According to M. O. Grenby ‘it was only really following Carlyle’s *French Revolution* (1837) that the mob became an independent entity and the chief agent of the action.’⁷⁹ Yet, the extent to which Carlyle’s sublime depiction of the mob went against the anti-Jacobin atmosphere still present in the 1830s is difficult to overstate. Carlyle’s own humorous (but also clearly proud) presentation of his book as *wild* and *savage*, can be seen as an apt description in view of the actual reception of Carlyle’s work in the British periodical press. Most of the criticism of *The French Revolution* focused on its ‘uncivilised’, irrational and ‘immoral’ character.

The stakes in Carlyle’s presentation of the Jacobins, we should be aware, are also the causes of the Irish and the working classes in Britain, abandoned by the political powers. In April 1837 workers protested in the streets after 4,000 weavers had been thrown out of work in Manchester. Days after the manifestation, Carlyle writes to his brother, expressing his sympathy for the workers and his condemnation of the New Poor Law, the fruit of Bentham’s philosophical utilitarianism, which replaced the old outdoor relief system with a system of workhouses, later in the century depicted most powerfully by Dickens. Carlyle describes the workhouses as the British Bastille, registering his protest against the inhumanity of the new law, and against the popularisers of Bentham’s system and the government’s campaign, such as Harriet Martineau, the author of a pro-reform political piece, *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (1833–34):

⁷⁸ CL 9:80-85.

⁷⁹ M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 52.

God knows there is little here to come to: Commercial crash coming on, spreading wider and wider; the Paupers of Manchester helping themselves out of shops, great bands of them parading with signals of want of bread! On the one hand, Miss Martineau and Secretary Chadwick celebrating their New Poor Law Bill as the miracle of recent Legislation; on the other, the poor Nottingham Peasant hanging all his four children and giving up himself to be hanged that they may not go to the Hunger-Tower of Dante here called ‘Bastile,’ or Parish-Workhouse. It is a clatter of formulistic jargon, of quackery, cruelty and hunger, that my soul is sick of.⁸⁰

In a letter to Emerson, less than a decade before the Great Famine in Ireland, Carlyle directly associates himself with the plight of the Irish who had been left to starvation by the most economically advanced country in the nineteenth-century world. Carlyle intentionally writes in the plural ‘we’ when depicting the Irish plight:

And yet your New England here too has the upper hand of our Old England, of our Old Europe: we too are sold to Mammon, soul, body and spirit; but (mark that, I pray you, with double pity) Mammon will not pay us,—we are “Two Million three hundred thousand in Ireland that have not potatoes enough”! I declare, in History I find nothing more tragical.⁸¹

With this larger political discussion in mind, let us turn back to Mill’s censorship of Carlyle’s quote from the ‘Journal of the Jacobins’ Debates’, which Carlyle interprets as an example of the common Whig-Radical credentials. The quote depicts the original British (and specifically Whig) warm support of the Revolution during the early reception of a Whig delegation in the Jacobin Club. In it the Whigs respond to an official welcome of the brotherly union (language no longer acceptable in the nineteenth-century political idiom) of three democratic nations (America, France and Britain):

A constitutional Whig (*Wigh*), a Brother, and Englishman, formed, few days ago, the object of one of your sweetest unitings (*étreintes*). What a charm had that picture! Souls of sensibility were struck with it; our hearts are yet full of emotion (*Applause*). This day you afford to that Brother, and to yourselves, a new enjoyment: you suspend to the dome of our temple three Flags, American, English, French.⁸²

Among the loud cries of ‘liberty forever!’, ‘the Nation forever!’ and ‘the three Free Peoples of the Universe forever!’, a speech is delivered by a French Deputation of Ladies in which they proclaim that henceforth one language of liberty is to be shared by

⁸⁰ *CL* 9:186-192.

⁸¹ *CL* 9:138-141.

⁸² *CME* 4:130.

the three nations: 'Nations will no longer battle with each other; straitly united, they will possess all Languages, and make them but one Language. Strong in their Freedom they will be inseparable forever.—'⁸³ The address finishes with a message of freedom which is to be passed to Britain by the Whig delegates:

As for you, Brothers, tell your countrymen what we are; tell them that in France the women too can love their country and show themselves worthy of Liberty; tell them that the union, of which you see the emblems, shall be imperishable as the Free Peoples are; that we have henceforth only one sort of bonds, the bonds which unite us to the Free, and that these shall be eternal as virtue.⁸⁴

Carlyle's aesthetic agenda can be appreciated in his introduction to the scene, where he specifically stresses the fact of casting the Jacobins in the 'moral-sublime' language, reserved by Burke only to royalty in the *Reflections*:

As it is not fit that all our scenes should be of tragedy or low-tragedy, the reader will perhaps consent now to a touch of the moral-sublime. Let him enter the Hall of the Jacobins with us. All men have heard of the Jacobins' Club; but not all would think of looking for comedy or the moral-sublime there. Nevertheless so it is. Ah! the sublime of the Jacobins was not always of the *blue-light* pandemoniac sort; far otherwise once!⁸⁵

Carlyle is here transposing the language of heroism to the Jacobins. By describing the revolutionaries in sublime language, he is provocatively inviting the reader to sympathise with them, and presenting their cause as a legitimate one. This, of course, is a direct challenge to *The Anti-Jacobin* line of depiction ('*blue-light* pandemoniac sort'), as Carlyle is well aware. The comedy in the description is reserved for the Whigs who attempt a 'sublime' reply to the brotherly call of France but are only capable of delivering a stammering answer in what Carlyle mockingly describes as a 'leg-of-mutton or postprandial style'⁸⁶ (an ironic comment on their removal from the reality of hunger in Britain and France). In an intended exchange of roles, it is the Whigs who, rather than the bearers and political administrators of the sublime tongue, are here presented as comical figures and excluded from the sublime language of the international political dialogue between Britain and France. The Jacobins, to whom the

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 131.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

sublime mode of depiction was denied by Macaulay and by the Whigs, are, by contrast, the true masters of the sublime.

Carlyle's use of comedy mixed with 'moral-sublime' is also the essence of his technique in *The French Revolution*, which he borrows perhaps most directly from *The Anti-Jacobin Review*. In Carlyle's narrative, it is applied to deliver his (essentially Calvinist) message about human depravity mixed with his sympathy for the plight of the French and admiration for their heroism. What Carlyle is saying in a grammar reminiscent of Walter Scott's presentation of the crowd in *The Heart of Midlothian*⁸⁷ is that the French are right to demand justice:

To us, therefore, let the French National Solemn League, and Federation, be the highest recorded triumph of the Thespian Art; triumphant surely, since the whole Pit, which was of Twenty-five Millions, not only claps hands, but does itself spring on the boards and passionately set to playing there. And being such, be it treated as such: with sincere cursory admiration; with wonder from afar. A whole Nation gone mumming deserves so much.⁸⁸

Unlike Whig discourse, which Carlyle sarcastically depicts as incapable of delivering the message of French ideals of freedom and brotherhood, Carlyle's 'savage' book is a medium ideally suited to carry the revolutionary French ethos to Britain. We get a glimpse of this idea from the argument between Carlyle and Mill in a letter in which Carlyle refers to the presentation of the Jacobins to the British public in a sublime language as the main purpose of his writing:

On the other hand I must totally dissent from Falconer, and you so far as you go with him, in regard to that of the Jacobins solemnity. It remains lively in my head, as one of the cheerfullest passages I met with in the whole H.P. [*Histoire Parlementaire*]. It is burlesque; but ought it not to be so? The Jacobins Society and their doings are not sublime to any man in England; to any man in the world, out of a small French clique. Intrinsically, and as it seems to me in final *reality*, they are a mixture of truculence, audacity and absurdity, not *without* something of sublimity at the heart of it; which something, if the English are ever to get at it, *this* vehicle, of banter and bluster, may sooner than another be the means of conveying to them.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Compare: Margaret M. Criscuola, 'The Portentous Mob; Fact and Truth in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*', *English Language Notes*, 22:1 (1984), 43-50.

⁸⁸ *FR* 2:49.

⁸⁹ *CL* 9:170-171.

Carlyle's letter reveals the ethos of *The French Revolution*, which adds to Mill's original youthful admiration for the French revolutionaries the dark Calvinist undertone of human depravity and Carlyle's personal apocalyptic view that rather than improving, humanity is more likely progressing towards further demoralisation and bestiality (in stark contrast to Mill's optimistic moral progressivism). Carlyle's opinion that Britain remains shut from the European perspective on French politics and fails to perceive the *sublime* dimension of the French Revolution, is the driving force of his epic. Without such a deeper, more spiritual perception of history, and a broader French and indeed European perspective on the spirit of the times (we should remember that Carlyle also inhabits the German Romantic perception), all radical thought in Britain remains shallow and ultimately as misguided as Robespierre's narrow political and cultural constructs. Carlyle's artistic critique is rendered in a 'banter and bluster' style, borrowed more or less directly from the *Anti-Jacobin*. The explicitly stated aim of Carlyle's presentation of the French in 'a mixture of truculence, audacity and absurdity' is not simply a bathetic depiction of French history, as has been frequently assumed,⁹⁰ but should rather be read as precisely the opposite: an intention to come to the 'sublimity at the heart of it,' which, in Carlyle's opinion, has been poignantly ignored in the British narratives of the Revolution. Carlyle aims at a symbolic and spiritual reading of the Revolution, which he sees as lacking in the shallowly political contemporary interpretations. This may appear a roundabout way of achieving the effect, but within the dominantly conservative and anti-French atmosphere of the first half of the nineteenth century, in which any direct challenge to the dominant narrative is promptly lost within the *Anti-Jacobin* propaganda, Carlyle's choice of language is a sly way of serving to the reader what Carlyle believes to be an accurate antidote to the dominating Francophobia.

Mill rightly senses the explosive nature of Carlyle's quotation and removes it entirely from *The Westminster Review*, while he reluctantly publishes the immediately following depiction of the September Massacres with an explanatory editorial footnote. In the footnote we are told that the 'Newgate Calendar character' of Carlyle's depiction (Newgate being the English equivalent of the Bastille ever since Burke's famous

⁹⁰ Compare, for example, Jean-François Leroux, *The Renaissance of Impasse: From the Age of Carlyle, Emerson, and Melville* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 41.

comparison⁹¹) is supposedly unacceptable when published *on its own* without a political-moral (didactic) interpretation, which is promised in the following number:

The opinions of this review on the French Revolution not having yet been expressed, the conductors feel it incumbent on them to enter a caveat against any presumption respecting those opinions which may be founded on the Newgate Calendar character of the above extracts. Some attempt at a judgment of that great historical event, with its good and its evil, will probably be attempted in the next number.⁹²

Mill's insistence on the necessity of an 'explanation' of the quoted extract echoes distinctly the *Anti-Jacobin* diction. *The Anti-Jacobin* stressed the didactic and censoring role of all its publications and saw its main role to be the fight with the 'spirit of Jacobinism' in the periodical press and all publications in Britain. The first number of the Review set this agenda:

To counteract the pernicious effects of this dangerous SYSTEM, and, by a necessary consequence, to restore criticism to its original standard, will constitute the grand, the prominent feature of the present publication. [...] We have been enabled, by the channels of communication that are open to us, to ascertain the melancholy fact, that nearly all the presses on the content of Europe are under the immediate influence either of FRENCH PRINCIPLES, OR OF FRENCH INTRIGUES.⁹³

Contrary to the image given by *The Anti-Jacobin*, an overwhelming predominance of the ultra-conservative publications following the French Revolution has recently been more consistently acknowledged in critical thought. This new emphasis on the conservative post-revolutionary thought, M. O. Grenby argues,

represents something more than a mere oscillation in scholarly fashion. It is essentially a recognition that loyalty, patriotism and even a quite specifically targeted anti-Jacobinism, were much more significant elements in British society—affecting more people more deeply—than any radical impulse had ever managed to become.⁹⁴

⁹¹ 'We have Lord George Gordon fast in Newgate; and neither his being a public proselyte to Judaism, nor his having, in his zeal against Catholic priests and all sorts of ecclesiastics, raised a mob (excuse the term, it is still in use here) which pulled down all our prisons, have preserved to him a liberty of which he did not render himself worthy by a virtuous use of it. We have rebuilt Newgate and tenanted the mansion. We have prisons almost as strong as the Bastille for those who dare to libel the queens of France.' Burke, *Reflections*, p. 68.

⁹² 'Parliamentary History of the French Revolution', *The London and Westminster Review*, 5:1 (1837), 233-247 (p. 246, John Stuart Mill's note).

⁹³ 'Prospectus', *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, 1 (1799), p. 3.

⁹⁴ Grenby, pp. 4-5.

As Grenby notes, Jacobinism became a catchphrase without any definition, and could be used instead non-specifically, to refer to any ideas or groups regarded as inimical to the (political, religious, or cultural) establishment:

It would be impossible to propose a precise definition of Jacobinism. Contemporaries used the word frequently, and often deliberately, without any exactness, purely to stigmatise their opponents. Jacobinism was simply a label for all that conservatives found detestable within society.⁹⁵

However, even though it is impossible to define Jacobinism, we can easily trace its main field of associations and linguistic referents (a lot of them rooted in Burke's *Reflections*), among which the main are: 'barbarous philosophy', or 'a new philosophy', 'moral chemistry', 'deception of the lower orders,' 'poison of atheism', 'diabolical effort to corrupt the minds of the rising generation',⁹⁶ 'Jacobin morality', 'New Morality',⁹⁷ anarchy, cosmopolitanism,⁹⁸ romanticism,⁹⁹ and Germanism (Grenby notices that 'by 1798 'German' and 'Jacobin' had become interchangeable terms').¹⁰⁰ Given this list, Carlyle's early novel, *Sartor*, can easily be seen as a direct satire on the *Anti-Jacobin's* programme.

Although Catholics are associated with Jacobinism from the first issue of *Anti-Jacobin*, it is from 1817 that *The Anti-Jacobin* begins to dedicate almost its entire issues to the British Catholics referred to as 'Jacobins'. That is because 1817 is the year when the question of the repeal of Test and Corporation Acts (which prevented Catholics and Nonconformist from taking any public position) was raised at a general meeting of the deputies for the first time since the campaign of 1787-90. *The Anti-Jacobin* refers to the Catholic emancipation as 'revolutionary in itself.'¹⁰¹ The Catholics become the addressees of the same aesthetics of barbarism and savagery as the French, and as elsewhere in *The Anti-Jacobin* the aesthetics of disgust play the role of leading the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹⁶ Stuart Andrews, *British Periodical Press and the French Revolution* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 108.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁹⁹ Compare, for example, the *Anti-Jacobin's* opinion on Wollstonecraft: 'We do not, however, so zealously adopt Miss W.'s plan for a REVOLUTION in female education and manners, as not to perceive that several of her opinions are fanciful, and some of her projects romantic.' *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁰ Grenby, p. 113.

¹⁰¹ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, vol. 52 (London: G. Sidney: 1817), p. 63. Compare also: '[I]t was endeavoured at the Revolution, to make this settlement conclusive and final, from a knowledge of the permanent and unchangeable nature of the catholic system, religious and political, from having seen and felt its operation, and from an experience of near 209 years, that its existence in *power* was incompatible with safety to *Protestant* establishment in church and state.' *Ibid.*, p. 64.

argument against the passing of the religious toleration laws: ‘To leave the question as it is, as a subject of annual controversy, and the source and pretence of continual agitation, will be to uncivilize the country in a progress rapidly tending to barbarism,— and must keep it in a state of constant embarrassment and incumbrance to the empire.’¹⁰² Appealing to the reader’s emotions and aesthetics, the *Anti-Jacobin* presents the repeal of the anti-Catholic laws as ‘disgusting’, and therefore not worth considering: ‘A measure which is disgusting to the great majority of all ranks throughout the United Kingdoms.’¹⁰³ It is disgusting and savage, because Ireland, a Catholic country is a savage country, the argument goes: ‘Ireland dominated by priests and their superstitions ‘there are no less than nine counties, at this time, disturbed by barbarous nocturnal outrages.’¹⁰⁴

It is primarily because of the agitation against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts by the *Anti-Jacobin* that Carlyle, as an outsider from the established Anglican creed, is able to sympathise politically with the Catholics and to challenge the *Anti-Jacobin* diction. Coming from a dissenting congregation of the Scottish Burgher Seceder Church, a respected community in Scotland, of which Carlyle till the end of his life held fond and reverent memories,¹⁰⁵ Carlyle would have been shocked to find the anti-Calvinist attitude in England generated by the *Anti-Jacobin*. From the beginning the *Anti-Jacobin* is decidedly anti-Scottish and specifically anti-Calvinist. This means that both Calvinists and Scots generally share the same imagery of an uncivilised, savage community with the Catholics (even if admittedly not as insistently as the latter). From the very first numbers the *Anti-Jacobin* publishes articles which ridicule Knox and Calvin, calling Knox ‘the Apostle of Rebellion’ and an unworthy member of the Protestant church.¹⁰⁶ Commenting on the work of the Bible Society, a nondenominational Protestant group set to spread the knowledge of the Scriptures, *The Anti-Jacobin* displays its sectarian prejudices against all dissenters:

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World: In Honour of A. C. Cheyne*, eds. Stewart J. Brown, George Newlands (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), ‘Carlyle and the Secession’, p. 25; and Ian Campbell, ‘Carlyle’s Religion: The Scottish Background’, in *Carlyle and his Contemporaries: Essays in Honor of Charles Richard Sanders*, ed. by John Clubbe (Durham, North Carolina, 1976).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *The Anti-Jacobin Review: From July to December 1798*, vol. 1 (London: J. Plymsell, 1799), pp. vi-viii.

That the Dissenters, of every denomination, should, for the first time in their lives, forego their wish to subvert the ecclesiastical establishment of the country; that men who, however opposite their tenets may be, and though still more remote from each other than any of them are from the Church of England, have always united for the purpose of destroying that church, should now coalesce with its members and ministers, for the promotion of one common religious object, without harbouring any sinister design, it requires a stretch of credulity to believe.¹⁰⁷

Quoting Arthur O'Connor to prove the apparently common Jacobin credentials of dissenters and Catholics, *The Anti-Jacobin* notes: 'The Catholics and Presbyterians are united in indissoluble ties, like dying martyrs, in a common cause, priding themselves in mutual good offices.'¹⁰⁸

In an article on the Episcopal church of Scotland, *The Anti-Jacobin* describes 'the schism of the Presbyterians' as blasphemous, liberal, and explicitly *sedition*, while all Presbyterians are exhorted 'to return, to the Episcopal reformed Churches from which they had strayed' since 'the schism was wilful and highly criminal.'¹⁰⁹ *The Anti-Jacobin* is equally critical of the Scottish system of education:

It will be a matter of exceeding surprise to most men that the study of the classics is ridiculed by the northern magi. It is no wonder that we have often to lament the revival and patronage of opinions long ago discussed and set to rest, and that it is not uncommon for a scholar to exclaim, Has not this been determined long ago? These Sciolists, despising the riches of antiquity, take up opinions as novel, which have been long antiquated or rejected by the common sense and experience of mankind.¹¹⁰

The main fault of the Scottish Universities is their rebellious attitude of not recognising the supposedly superior learning traditions of the English universities, in introducing such disciplines as, for example, botanics in place of classical learning: 'this unfortunate

¹⁰⁷ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, vol. 52 (London: G. Sidney: 1817), p. 139.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁹ 'Bp. Drummond's *Defence of the Episcopal Church of Scotland*', *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, vol. 15 (London: R. Bostock: 1808). The schism of the Presbyterians is presented as 'highly criminal', and Calvinists are seen as dangerous 'liberals': '[W]e can't maintain that the church may be lawfully divided, when no sinful term of communion is required, although it is by many in these days, considered as a charitable and liberal sentiment, it is directly contradictory to our Blessed Saviour's doctrine, and to the general tenor of the New Testament.' *Ibid.*, p. 84. Compare also: '[I]t is impossible for the greatest genius that ever lived [...] to conceive any thing more criminal, than deliberately to cause the Saviour of the world to be blasphemed [...] I am willing to believe, that few who commit this sin see the sad consequences of their conduct, and deliberately transgress [...] all who causelessly divide any pure party of Christ's flock, actually do the thing; and although they should mean well, which seditious people rarely do, the best intention will no more vindicate them, than it did Saul when he persecuted our Lord's disciples.' *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹⁰ John Gibson Lockhart, 'Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk', in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, vol. 61 (London: G. Sidney, 1819), p. 501.

disdain of the pillars of sound learning originates from the very defective system of education pursued at the Scotch Universities.’¹¹¹ Scottish universities are not only inferior to the English ones,¹¹² they are also denied the ‘sublime’ character which is apparently connected specifically with English culture and history.¹¹³ Also *The Edinburgh Review* is an object of *The Anti-Jacobin*’s attack, since it encourages *rebellious passions* in the nation, by addressing directly the ‘most vicious and most illiterate’ part of the nation:

It is truly observed, that this Review [*The Edinburgh Review*] administered, *ex professo*, to the worst passions of our nature. Its design was not to encourage the dissident, praise the deserving, and instruct the ignorant, but to bring the best and wisest down to the level of the most vicious and most illiterate.¹¹⁴

Calvinists are also linked to Jacobin philosophy through the person of William Godwin (1756-1836), who had a zealously Calvinist upbringing and was a Dissenting minister in his early life, as well as through a general association with the non-conformists such as Richard Price (1723-1791) and Joseph Priestley (1733-1804). In *George Barnwell* (1798), an anti-Jacobin novel by T. S. Surr (Thomas Skinner), the main character, tellingly called Mr Mental, becomes a criminal supposedly as a direct result of his adopting scepticism and atheism of the new philosophy through his apprenticeship under a Calvinist, fittingly called, Mr Nutting (modelled partly on Priestly, partly on

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

¹¹² ‘They [Scottish Universities] diffuse over every part of the kingdom, and over many parts of the neighbouring kingdoms, a mighty population of men, who have received a kind and measure of education which fits them for taking a keen and active management in the affairs of ordinary life. But they seldom send forth men who are so thoroughly accomplished in any one branch of learning, as to be likely to possess through that alone, the means of attaining to eminence; and, what is worse, the course of the studies which have been pursued under their direction, has been so irregular and multifarious, that it is a great chance whether any one branch of occupation may have made such a powerful and commanding impression on the imagination of the student, as might induce him afterwards to perfect and complete for himself what the University can only be said to have begun.’ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

¹¹³ ‘Those great and venerable institutions have both existed from the very commencement of the English monarchy, and have been gradually strengthened and enriched into their present condition, by the piety and the munificence of many successive generations of kings and nobles. They are frequented by those only who may be called upon, at some future period, to discharge the most sacred and most elevated duties of English citizenship; and the magnificence of the establishments themselves carries down a portion of its spirit into the humblest individual who connects himself with them. The student is lodged in a palace, and when he walks abroad, his eyes are fed on every side with the most splendid assemblages of architectural pomp and majesty which our island can display. He dines in a hall, whose lofty compartments are occupied with the portraits of the illustrious men who of old underwent the same discipline in which he is now engaged, amidst the same appropriate and impressive accompaniments of scene and observance. He studies in his closet the same books which have, for a thousand years, formed the foundation of the intellectual character of Englishmen. In the same chapel wherein the great and good men of England were wont to assemble, he listens, every evening and every morning, to the same sublime music, and sublimer words, by which their devotion was kindled, and their faith sustained.’ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

Godwin). The moral of the tale is that had Mental not been shown religion 'in so distorted a shape, he would never have plunged into the rest of his errors.'¹¹⁵ Calvinism, then, quite directly shares in *The Anti-Jacobin* discredit of enthusiasm, passion and madness, and so we see both Carlyle's national, cultural and religious agenda dismissed and ridiculed by the *Anti-Jacobin* propaganda.

Curiously, though, Carlyle also borrows the *Anti-Jacobin* rhetoric and style in the depictions of revolutionary terror. The mocking scenes which depict the implementation of the new secular religion established by the French regime are directly indebted to *The Anti-Jacobin* imagery and style:

Here began the Ceremony so much admired by the Jacobin Prints. HERBERT kept a strumpet of the name of MOMORO, the Wife of a renegado Corsican. This miserable Prostitute was fixed upon to represent the GODDESS of REASON; she was fantastically tricked out, and lead to the head of a Grand Procession to the Church of *Notre Dame*, the Cathedral of Paris. Here she was solemnly placed on a Throne of Turf and Flowers, while GOBET and the rest of the Revolutionary Clergy burnt Incense on an Alter erected just before her.

While this was performing, the cannon announced the instauration of the new Goddess: the *enlightened* People of Paris fell prostrate at the Signal, and paid their brutified adorations at the feet of a Street-walker and an Adulteres!!!¹¹⁶

Carlyle's bathetic depiction of the same scene is clearly indebted in its tone and imagery to *The Anti-Jacobin*, and also specifically in the keen sense of the absurdity of human behaviour:

For the same day, while this brave Carmagnole dance has hardly jigged itself out, there arrive Procureur Chaumette and Municipals and Departmentals, and with them the strangest freightage: a New Religion! Demoiselle Candaille, of the Opera; a woman fair to look upon, when well rouged: she, borne on palanquin shoulder-high; with red woolen nightcap; in azure mantle; garlanded with oak; holding in her hand the Pike of the Jupiter-People, sails in; heralded by white young women girt in tricolor. Let the world consider it! This, O National Convention wonder of the universe, is our New Divinity; Goddess of Reason, worthy, and alone worthy of revering. Nay, were it too much to ask of an august National Representation that it also went with us to the ci-devant

¹¹⁵ Compare: Grenby, p. 85.

¹¹⁶ 'Misrepresentations', *Anti-Jacobin Review* 7 (December 1797), pp. 218-220 p. 219.

Cathedral called of Notre-Dame, and executed a few strophes in worship of her?¹¹⁷

Next to the *Anti-Jacobin*'s sharp satire, there is in Carlyle's description a tone of mild sympathy with human weakness and irrationality, which is in line with Carlyle's motto in the chapter entitled 'Mankind': 'Pardonable are human theatricalities; nay perhaps touching.'¹¹⁸ The *Anti-Jacobin*'s 'miserable Prostitute' is portrayed by Carlyle jokingly as 'Demoiselle Candeille, of the Opera; a woman fair to look upon, when well rouged'. Carlyle's description of the whole gaudy and kitschy apparel of the Goddess of Reason with her sceptre *sailing in* on the waves of the people creates a grotesque and other-worldly scenery. Compared with the short cynical statements of the *Anti-Jacobin*'s description, Carlyle's smooth style, long poetic sentences and rhetorical questions to the reader add to Carlyle's satire an atmosphere of pondering upon the shared (and not always very rational) humanity of the French nation and the reader. Whereas the *Anti-Jacobin* speaks from a privileged 'rational' position, which is contrasted with that of the 'Jacobin Prints', Carlyle seems to be far less assured of his readers' rationality. Would the reader be really so strong as to withstand the (somewhat ludicrous and yet highly appealing) charms of the new French goddess? Carlyle seems to be suggesting that Britain is not as impervious to the allures of irrationality and absurdity as it believes itself to be. The depiction is ultimately a joke at *The Anti-Jacobin* and the British belief in their superiority over the French.

Carlyle is perhaps speaking for himself as much as for the spirit of his times. Together with Mill at the beginning of their friendship, he went through a period of short infatuation with Saint-Simonianism, which aimed to establish a new type of Christian-rooted political religion, called New Christianity. Whereas Mill developed Saint-Simonian ideas in his utopian programme for a Religion of Humanity, Carlyle quickly came to believe that the mysticism of Saint-Simonians was not far from Edward Irving's increasingly hysterical sect.¹¹⁹ What Carlyle took from the Saint-Simonians, though, was their thorough concern for the plight of the working people, the idea of the need of a spiritual reformation of Europe, and the belief that religion needs to work within the political structures of this world, however faulty these may be. On the other

¹¹⁷ *FR* 3:227.

¹¹⁸ *FR* 2:58.

¹¹⁹ 'Enfantin becomes quite intelligible to me from my knowledge of Edward Irving. The Enthusiast nowise excludes the Quack; nay rather (especially in such times as these) presupposes him.' *CL* 6:237-242.

hand, he rejected (while Mill adopted wholeheartedly) the ideas of moral progress, and the utilitarian language of Saint-Simonians, as well as their reduction of religion to politics, as well as the idea that ‘the sole aim of Christianity’ is the ‘the quickest possible improvement of the well-being of the poorest classes’.¹²⁰

Mill’s mythologising of *The French Revolution*, as we have seen, has the effect of camouflaging its radical political and religious sympathies. In another extended review of Carlyle’s works (clearly influenced by Mill’s appraisal of *The French Revolution*) published in *The Westminster Review* in 1839, John Sterling praises the epic qualities of Carlyle’s history:

This history is, in fact, a genuine breathing epic. [...] It shows how the most golden fancy, and the most vivifying imagination, may be exercised, in all their glory and fullest flood, within the bounds of the literally true, of that which was transcended in the lives of our fathers.¹²¹

The review, which presents one of the keenest and most sympathetic appraisals of Carlyle’s writing, cost Sterling a lot of energy and some reprimands from his intimate friends from the Broad Church party, as he explained in a letter to Julius Charles Hare (1795-1855):¹²² ‘Though I expect to lose friends and gain enemies, I am glad of having spoken out what seems to me true.’¹²³ He also described the difficulties of writing the review in a letter to Richard Chenevix Trench (1807-1886), where he justified himself and attempted to prepare Trench for the review which he knew would not be approved of:

I am trying to write a review of Carlyle’s miscellaneous works, which I find a difficult task, and I may very possibly throw aside my attempt, even after formally completing it. One daily learns more and more what a serious matter a written, and especially a printed word is, and how

¹²⁰ Henri de Saint-Simon, *New Christianity*, in *Henri Comte de Saint-Simon: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), p. 54. Compare also Saint-Simon’s moral progressivism: ‘The dogmatic part of Luther’s reform failed. The reform was incomplete, and itself needs to be reformed. I accuse the Lutherans of heresy on this first count: of adopting a morality much inferior to the morality appropriate to Christians in the present stage of their civilisation.’ *Ibid.*, p. 36. Saint-Simon rejects all ‘mysticism and trickery’ as Catholic inventions.

¹²¹ Mill distanced himself from Sterling’s article by adding an editorial note stating that the views represented in the article are in no way the expression of the editors’ views, even if they ‘stand within a certain circle of relationship to the general spirit of our practical views.’ John Sterling, ‘Carlyle’s Works’, *The Westminster Review*, 33:1 (1839), 1-68, p. 68.

¹²² Carlyle’s *Life of John Sterling* (1851) was later written through dissatisfaction with Hare’s biography of Sterling.

¹²³ Tod E. Jones, *The Broad Church: A Biography of a Movement* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), p. 160.

inevitably it disquiets one's life and one's relations with mankind, and particularly with those one most values, from whom to differ is a heartfelt evil.¹²⁴

As Tod E. Jones demonstrates in *The Broad Church: A Biography of a Movement*, Carlyle entered Sterling's life at the point when he was about to begin his studies in German theology and to resign his clerical duties, both of which could have been at least partly blamed by his friends of Anglican sympathies on Carlyle's influence.¹²⁵ In this light, Sterling's anxiety that he would offend them by publishing a laudatory review of Carlyle's works in Mill's journal was more than justified. Sterling's friendship with Hare, John Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), one of the founders of Christian Socialism, and Trench, an Anglican archbishop, all leading representatives of the Broad Church movement, dated back to the Trinity College. In his early years Sterling found himself balancing insecurely between the utilitarian radicalism of Mill and the conservative Cambridge societies: 'I was going to be stoned with stones at Cambridge for being an enemy to religion, and now I am ground to powder by a Mill in London for excessive piety.'¹²⁶ Despite Sterling's explanations, both Maurice and Trench heavily resented his review of Carlyle. Maurice complained to Trench of 'how much pain it has caused me'¹²⁷ and Trench in a letter to Archdeacon Wilberforce similarly stated that Sterling's article

has given me very great grief, and since I saw it, which was only a few days ago, I have not failed to tell him what I felt about it. It has caused me also quite as much wonder as pain.¹²⁸

In a letter of apology to Trench, Sterling again tried to distance himself from his review claiming not very convincingly that in fact his opinion of Carlyle was not too far from Trench's estimation:

[My review] says, in other words, partly much what you say of the *Sartor Resartus*, which is in the main a mere litany of despair, and with all its depth of heart and strength of imagery seems to me a failure as a piece of emotion, though this last opinion I have not expressed in my article,

¹²⁴ Richard Chenevix Trench, *Letters and Memorials*, vol. I (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1888), p. 238.

¹²⁵ Jones, *The Broad Church*, p.159.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.139.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.mi

¹²⁸ Trench, *Letters and Memorials*, vol. I, p. 243.

thinking there were people enough who had said or would say the same.¹²⁹

Despite these assurances to the opposite, in his review Sterling eulogises *Sartor Resartus* as ‘the orgasm of shaping thought and desolating emotion’.¹³⁰ The explosive (homo)sexual energy of Carlyle’s work is described here in a rather peculiar language of masculine virility which apparently fails to respond to the ‘more tranquil’ sublime of the female body. In contrast with Sterling’s construct of female sublime, associated with maternity and passivity, Carlyle’s sublime style is chaotic and driven by (self)destructive sexual energy. It derives its verve from facing directly its enemies in an open conflict rather than looking for a calm solution to the dispute. Carlyle’s alternating work of creation and destruction seems to represent the way in which his argument develops, by quickly glancing and undermining not only his enemies’ positions but also his own opinions. From Sterling’s review Carlyle’s sublime style emerges as a mode of self-examination as much as of exploration of his milieu:

But here in this volume, the orgasm of shaping thought and desolating emotion bursts with ruin through the steadfast bounds of science, of art, and of conscientious activity. The author brings together creation and destruction to work precipitately and face to face in open conflict, not with their true and everlasting though unacknowledged alliance. His own heart reads the purport of their operation, and eagerly feels the greatness of their task, but shares none of that sublime tranquillity in which the twain repose, nursed at either breast of their mighty mother.¹³¹

There is however also perhaps more than a suggestion of impotence in this imagery and of a problem with the feminine in Carlyle’s works. It may reflect Sterling’s criticism of Carlyle’s hero worship elsewhere as unrealistic and unfair to the every-day mundane, and specifically to the pleasures of domestic life, which elsewhere Sterling does much to praise. Polemicising with Carlyle’s depiction of nineteenth-century Britain as lacking in heroism, Sterling stated: ‘There is more of the heroism of domestic life now than in any age of the world.’¹³² As elsewhere, though, Sterling is torn between this conservative domestic image of Britain on the one hand, and Carlyle’s and Mill’s radical vocabulary on the other. In his letter to Sterling from October 1831 Mill claimed: ‘[F]or until the whole of the existing institutions of society are levelled with

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹³⁰ Sterling, ‘Carlyle’s Works’, pp. 55-56.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Cf. Jones, *The Broad Church*, p. 166.

the ground, there will be nothing for a wise man to do which the most pig-headed fool cannot do much better than he.’¹³³ The sublime destructive potentiality of Carlyle’s writing carries specifically in Sterling’s account this radical energy to which he is both attracted and which he resents as unrealistic and irrational.

The predominating quality of Carlyle’s style, though, is for Sterling its manifest, immensely attractive but also disturbing oddity. *Sartor Resartus* specifically is claimed to be an artistic aberration and mutation depicted in a deformed imagery of female-animalistic body. Instead of providing milk of an ordinary sort, Carlyle feeds the reader with the milk of ‘a she-mammoth’:

Tis weird work all. If Jean Paul presents to us milk and wine, here, instead of wine, is alcohol and something more, and the milk what one might fancy not of a cow, but a she-mammoth. [...] Nothing beautiful is here; nothing calmly, manifestly wise. We look at it not for its worth, but its oddity. [...] The root of sorrow and evil is laid bare, and frightens the sunshine with its blackness.¹³⁴

Sterling links Carlyle’s exuberant enthusiasm and hero worship to the Presbyterian tradition, and specifically to Luther’s ‘equal liability to fierce and scornful prejudice.’¹³⁵ Similarly to Luther’s style, also Carlyle’s writing is ironic and poignant – ‘a sword to attack.’¹³⁶

Carlyle’s reaction to Sterling’s article noted in *The Life of John Sterling* (1851) leaves no doubt that he was flattered by Sterling’s exuberant and ‘fiery exaggerations’ and the ‘heroic emphasis’ of his style. He simultaneously acknowledged that he was aware of the fact that the ‘audacities’ of Sterling required some ‘daring’ and that they would have caused him a temporary schism from his friends. Although Carlyle was realistic about little effect that Sterling’s review would have had on the wider public, he acknowledged it as a pledge of close friendship and recognition from Sterling more than anything else:

[I] remember well [...] the deep silent joy [...] which it gave to myself in my then mood and situation; as it well might. The first generous human recognition, expressed with heroic emphasis, and clear conviction visible amid its fiery exaggeration, that one’s poor battle in this world is not quite

¹³³ Mill to John Sterling, October 20, 1831, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, p. liv.

¹³⁴ Sterling, ‘Carlyle’s Works’, pp. 54-5.

¹³⁵ Jones, *The Broad Church*, p. 65.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

a mad and futile, that it is perhaps a worthy and manful one, which will come to something yet [...] The thought burnt in me like a lamp, for several days; lighting up into a kind of heroic splendor the sad volcanic wrecks, abysses, and convulsions of said poor battle, and secretly I was very grateful to my daring friend, and am still, and ought to be. What the public might be thinking about him and his audacities, and me in consequence, or whether it thought at all, I never learned, or much heeded to learn.¹³⁷

In view of Sterling's depiction of Carlyle's work, his praises of Carlyle's pity and 'mother's tenderness' for all the actors in the French Revolution sound much more suspicious than Mill's, if not outright ironic. All victims of historical conflicts, Sterling claims, are the addressees of Carlyle's sympathy and 'passionate sorrow':

Thus having taken anxious measure of the perplexities and dangers of human life in its higher progresses, he has learnt also to pity, with a mother's tenderness, the failings and confusions of those against whom these hostile forces have prevailed. His proudest and most heroic odes in honour of the conquerors are mingled with or followed by some strain of pity for those who have fallen and been swallowed up in the conflict. The dusky millions of human shapes that flit around us, and in the history stream away, fill him with an almost passionate sorrow.¹³⁸

Both tyrants and victims, Sterling writes with a pinch of distinctly *Anti-Jacobin* irony, receive an equal share of Carlyle's sentimental and all-embracing feeling of motherly love (whereas we were distinctly told before that Carlyle's writings delight in strife and conflict and are far from such a 'maternal' vision). Only occasionally when focusing on the victims of the historical conflicts does Carlyle miss his chance to sympathise with the *oppressors* as well, who being 'poisoned with sweet baits in the flush and abundance of life' are supposedly entitled even more to the reader's and author's pity:

Only when the sufferers are in the foreground and his main objects, does he seem to forget that their oppressors or despisers, the tyrannous, luxurious, frivolous, empty-hearted, are also themselves victims, playing the part of destroyers: that circumstances had done wrong to them, no less than to those whom they harass and degrade: and that to be slowly poisoned with sweet baits in the flush and abundance of life, and so to sink away in sottish dreams, is not at all less horrible than to be gradually starved and worn to death, while courage, or at least dumb endurance, confronts the inevitable blow, and hope whispers in the sharpened ear, that a better destiny lies beyond.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Works* 11: 192.

¹³⁸ Sterling, 'Carlyle's Works', p. 7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

In this list of pious benedictions on the ‘despisers, the tyrannous luxurious, frivolous’ and ‘empty-hearted’, we can perhaps recognise a somewhat ironic echo of the chief tenets of Mill’s programme of progressive improvement of morality through an exercise of feelings and crucially, of sympathetic imagination. Specifically recent French history in Mill’s programme is a practice-field in which the readers can display their sympathetic abilities. The French as a nation, according to Mill, are especially endowed with elevated and sympathetic feelings, of which they have become masters through constant exercise:

Compare this with the French! whose faults, if equally real, are at all events different; among whom sentiments, which by comparison at least may be called elevated, are the current coin of human intercourse, [...] and are kept alive by constant exercise, and stimulated by sympathy [...] general culture of the understanding, which results from the habitual exercise of the feelings.¹⁴⁰

The main channel of improvement of sympathy among the British people was for Mill to be the new Religion of Humanity, in light of which man was to become his own aim and standard, and all transcendence was to be rejected.¹⁴¹ Mill’s own praises of Carlyle’s sympathetic imagination should perhaps be juxtaposed with his appraisal of Victor Hugo, whom Mill presents equally as a writer of great sympathetic imagination, yet politically and morally deluded (a suggestion of which we also get in Mill’s review of Carlyle). In Mill and Désiré Nisard’s review, *Les Misérables* is presented as an ‘irrational’ book in which the writer’s exuberant imagination is specifically linked to his lack of moral insight:

With [Hugo], Imagination is all in all. [...] [N]o thoughts being susceptible of being applied to conduct; nothing, or next to nothing, of real life; no philosophy — no ethics— no attempt to improve or to criticize his age, either by intelligent and searching inquiry, by sympathy, or by satire; no plan, no purpose; no opinions—for we cannot give that name to the commonplaces, whether serious or light, which have served him as a mere ground to embroider verse and prose upon. We find nothing, in short, of that which, in a literary production, speaks more

¹⁴⁰ Mill, *Autobiography*, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 1, p. 61.

¹⁴¹ Compare, for example, Albert J. LaValley’s reading of *The French Revolution* which seems to echo Mill’s programme in *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 141: ‘Carlyle makes it clear that there is no room for supernatural action in his epic of man and his history.’ Compare also: ‘The ancient quality of the myth, its very pre-civilised ‘feel,’ enhances the sense of a return to a primitive ground that is ultimate and all-powerful.’ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

particularly to the Reason. [...] M. Hugo writes from his fancy alone [...].¹⁴²

It is difficult not to notice that for Mill also with Carlyle ‘Imagination is all in all’ and that his political opinions are at least negligible if not outright wrong, as is the case with Hugo.

Sterling’s own appreciation of Carlyle’s imaginative style, as we have already seen, was a complex one, which (not altogether unlike Mill’s) ranged between fascination and disapproval. A couple of years after the publication of his review of Carlyle, in 1843, desperate of the Church reform which he had hoped would trigger a moral reform in the nation, Sterling wrote to Emerson: ‘Every grown man of nobler spirit is either theoretical and lukewarm, or swathed up in obsolete sectarianism.’ In another letter he stated emphatically: ‘Carlyle is our Man, and he seems to feel it is his function, not to build up and enjoy, [...] but to mourn, denounce, and tear in pieces.’¹⁴³ Clearly, it is the destructive potential of Carlyle’s writings which fascinates Sterling at this point.

Yet, in the discussed review of Carlyle’s works in 1839 Carlyle’s sublime imagination is depicted by Sterling not only as fascinating and attractive, but also as a dangerously delusive Puritan trait of his writings which are full of ‘scornful prejudice’. Carlyle’s sympathy is more often than not *misplaced*, as he is apparently only able to sympathise with historical winners and fails to sympathise with the losers: ‘His applause is never for him that putteth off his armour, but always for him that putteth it on.’¹⁴⁴ After repeating Mill’s appraisal of *The French Revolution* as a modern epic, Sterling immediately adds that it contains

many sayings which a friend of Mr Carlyle’s might be pardoned if he wished to blot out with tears. These are painful in different ways, and would be hard to class under one head. But their most general character is that of a hatred for things as they are, showing itself in cool mockery at their destruction, and in joy at manifestations, however monstrous, of the will to destroy them.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² John Stuart Mill, Désiré Nisard, ‘Victor Hugo’, *The Westminster Review*, 2:4 (1836), pp. 389-417, p. 395.

¹⁴³ Jones, *The Broad Church*, p. 166.

¹⁴⁴ Sterling, ‘Carlyle’s Works’, p. 37.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

The sublime joy that Carlyle derives from the destructive potential of his writings acquires here distinctly negative connotations. Carlyle clearly enjoys depicting the revolutionaries at their work too much for Sterling's taste. The focus of Sterling is the passage depicting the September Massacres:

What a spectacle is it to see such a man as this, so rich in endowment, so decisive and victorious in performance, who yet finds the world, and the world's law, and the law of his own nature, so ill a friend to him, that he more sympathizes with almost the worst rebellion against all law than with almost the best submission to it.¹⁴⁶

Despite what we were told earlier about Carlyle's catholic sympathy with all humanity, here Sterling clearly finds the author's sympathy ill-bestowed and morally unacceptable. Carlyle's calculations make him 'a blockhead, and one speaking with extempore inspiration rather than with a moment's forethought.'¹⁴⁷ Sterling rages in an apocalyptic biblical protest against the perversion and moral corruption of Carlyle's work:

O! shame, shame to use the wonderful power of words for thus darkening men's plainest and holiest knowledge. The difference is not in many or few, custom or no custom, hidden or scarlet, but in the souls, the purposes, the feelings of the men who do the deed.¹⁴⁸

Since the September massacres display 'the influence of the most atrocious feelings', they are condemnable and therefore, the argument goes, should *not* be sympathised with. Carlyle belongs to the 'justly hateful class of human beings'¹⁴⁹ for displaying sympathy with the French, while *The French Revolution* is said to question the basic norms of human morality:

Thus it was that they broke through all the restraints of moral custom, which he who defies, except in order to promote some still higher than customary truth, is in the most justly hateful class of human beings, and not the less hateful, the more we hold him also deplorable.¹⁵⁰

In the newly assumed role of a biblical prophet, Sterling condemns human compassion for those who in 'the spirit of Cain' reject the 'divine reverence' for life. The author of *The French Revolution*, who places himself outside the sacred traditions of humanity, is

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

presented as animal-like and as guilty of the sin of breaking the sacred knowledge shared by all humanity, while his ‘savage style’ is no longer a welcome guest:

But the existence in one man of the spirit of Cain, of cunning, ruthless malignity, which casts aside not only all human compassion, but the divine reverence for the life of man as a thing consecrate and inviolable—and this at no bidding of sudden passion, and no hot thirst of conflict, much less at the clear command of reason, which authorises [...] the soldier to fight for his own country against a foreign one, —this is a new and peculiar fact, sufficient to appal every man not too near the brutes for even the dimmest meditation.¹⁵¹

Let us briefly compare Sterling’s appraisal of the September Massacres with Merivale’s one published a year later. In the already quoted review in *The Edinburgh Review* Merivale similarly assumes the tone of an angered biblical prophet and moral high priest when he criticises Carlyle’s dangerous and ‘perverted’ morality and sophistry that contradict men’s ‘sound and healthy feelings’:

The heart of man will have become sorely perverted, we suspect, before it is persuaded by the sentimentalism of peace societies, or sophistry of would-be philosophers, into abandoning the sound and healthy feeling which regards a single life destroyed in cold blood as a more grievous outrage to humanity than ten thousand slaughtered on the field of battle. We do not suspect Mr Carlisle [*sic*] of penning such passages as this in serious earnest—but he is playing with a firebrand paradox, of very dangerous brilliancy.¹⁵²

Curiously then, here, Merivale who eagerly pens paeans to Robespierre’s moral uprightness, assumes here a Burkean style and is shocked by Carlyle’s lax morality in his presentation of the revolutionaries. As in Sterling’s review, Carlyle’s sympathetic imagination is both lauded for its artistic qualities and blamed for dangerously perverting the readers’ common-sense moral judgment of right and wrong. Merivale condescendingly grants Carlyle the doubt of ignorance and extreme naivety by presenting him as a sentimental writer whose imagination distorts his judgement. Rather than an immoral author who wishes to lead his readers astray, Carlyle is himself a naïve and misled artist whose opinions must not be taken too seriously:

Something of this peculiarity seems owing also to the *bonhomie* with which the writer appears to make personal acquaintance with all the individuals whose fortunes he relates. There are many persons who can

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁵² Merivale, ‘The French Revolution. A History.’, p. 426.

work themselves into a tolerable degree of virtuous indignation against criminals whose atrocious actions they hear or read of, but are not proof against the softening influence of personal communication. If they have once been brought face to face, though it be with a murderer on the eve of his execution, have hear him express his wants and feelings, and, as it were, realised him as a fellow-creature—they cannot find it in their heart to abjure all common humanity with him. So it is with Mr Carlyle, and his evoked spirits of the Revolution.¹⁵³

Curiously, Merivale refers to the language of physical as well as emotional and imaginative proximity to the characters of the Revolution (Carlyle presents them, as though, standing ‘face to face’ with the reader) as the root of his moral delusion. Lack of critical distance, we are told, renders Carlyle’s spiritual practices dangerously delusive. In evoking ‘the spirits of the Revolution’ Carlyle seems to bring to live and embody what should remain a matter of distinctly *unimaginative* historical study and criticism rather than lively imaginative fiction.

It is worth noticing, that, unlike Merivale and Sterling, John Wilson, writing for *Blackwood*, had no problem with Carlyle’s exuberantly imaginative, intense and often almost bathetically intimate presentation of the revolutionary heroes. That Carlyle chooses to present his characters *intus et in cute* (literally, ‘inhabiting their skins’) is only a matter of his sharp, savage humour and sympathetic depiction of human madness, as well as of his Burkean satire on ‘pure reason’. The grotesquely close and often deformed carnality is a conscious satirical challenge to what Carlyle regards as an overly rational historical and philosophical styles:

Nor murderer nor murdered comes amiss to this critic of pure reason. He understands *intus et in cute* [inside and out] each cut-throat as he tramps by on his vocation with tucked-up shirt-sleeves, and looks after him with a philosophic smile.¹⁵⁴

Carlyle’s savage Swiftian brand of humour, masterfully grasped by Wilson, is completely lost on Merivale. Whereas Sterling seems to catch some good insights into it echoed in his own fascination with Carlyle’s captivating style, he also adds that Carlyle’s powerful sublime depiction of the Revolution is morally dangerous specifically because of the emotional effects it produces in the reader (‘an eager, wide ebullience of the soul’). Its captivating imaginative force possesses the readers ‘like sorcery’ from which, even if they want to, they are unable to liberate themselves. This

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹⁵⁴ Wilson, *op cit.*

ultimately implicates the readers in the author's 'immeasurable weight of pain and grief' that are the foundations of Carlyle's grim and apparently humourless worldview:

[*The French Revolution*] has nothing to cheer – nothing to tranquilize. But that which most agitates, and like sorcery possesses the reader, is not the tale of idle folly drivelling on till it ends in the worse earnest of madness, and horror thickening the pure sunshine with the reek of death. [...] That which darkens and scares us more than all this, is the perpetual sense of the writer's wasting toil of heart, of the immeasurable weight of pain and grief which he has not ceased to bear – the stern resolve, compressing the mad furies of the soul, but unable to cast them out.'¹⁵⁵

Despite this grave verdict on Carlyle's style as reflecting the author's humourless and disenchanted *Weltanschauung*, there is more than a suggestion in Carlyle's own presentation of his aim in *The French Revolution* that he saw it as a text designed to provide a cathartic experience to the British public, which would allow Britain to liberate itself from the dark spirits of the past. Sterling's bleak verdict on Carlyle's worldview must be juxtaposed with Carlyle's comments on Madame de Staël's *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, which he considered a crucial text that his work was designed to answer. In a letter to Mill written in March 1835 he stated: 'I will also have de Staël's *Considerations*; [...] — The thing must be made better than it was, or we shall never be able, not to forget it, but to laugh victorious in remembering it.'¹⁵⁶ The purpose of *The French Revolution*, then, is a conscious re-examination of the British and European demons from the past, which is supposed to deliver the readers from their historical trauma. The stated aim is to be able to laugh victoriously rather than to sentimentally lament. The cathartic experience Carlyle aims at is akin to Professor Teufelsdröckh's strong purgative drug which in *Sartor Resartus* he applies to the society, a folk medicine popularly known as the devil's dung. The French Revolution, Carlyle seems to suggest, needs to be aesthetically re-lived and re-examined (from a distinctly folk-popular perspective), without which it will keep haunting the British subconscious in reappearing Gothic forms.

It is difficult not to notice, though, that the closure and distance which Carlyle proposes in his letter to Mill is expressed in a somewhat disturbing language of victoriously (re)conquering the French historical terrain, an agenda that is far from unproblematic, and seems to come close to some of the more claustrophobic traits of Macaulay's vision

¹⁵⁵ Sterling, 'Carlyle's Works', p. 63.

¹⁵⁶ *CL* 8:71-72.

of British historiography. The fact that the text never achieves such a closure is perhaps a reflection of Carlyle's ironic spirit expressed in the title. If *The French Revolution* is 'a history', it is also 'a British' or even 'a Scottish history', not to be regarded as an authoritative reading of the events, but instead as (another) Romantic and imaginative enquiry and reopening of what Carlyle regards as a prematurely finished and ossified debate.

In Carlyle's description of the September Massacres, to which both Merivale and Sterling refer in their reviews, we hear overtones of Walter Scott's presentation of the crowd in *The Heart of Midlothian*, in which Scott uses Burke's language of terror juxtaposed with a poetical justification of the people who are presented as acting out of their wrongs. We find a similar idea in Carlyle's depiction of the September crowds, which Carlyle calls metaphorically the 'Severe Justice of the People'. Whereas the massive killings in Paris in September 1792 are far from the heroic taking of the Bastille, they spring from the same source – human misery:

This is the September Massacre, otherwise called 'Severe Justice of the People.' These are the Septemberers (Septembriseurs); a name of some note and lucency,—but lucency of the Nether-fire sort; very different from that of our Bastille Heroes, who shone, disputable by no Friend of Freedom, as in heavenly light-radiance: to such phasis of the business have we advanced since then!¹⁵⁷

Contrary to Sterling's portrayal of the scene, Carlyle's depiction is full of Gothic horror and a recognition of a demonic action ('lucency of the Nether-fire sort'). However, Carlyle also believes that although it is justified that 'a shriek of inarticulate horror' should have risen at the sight of the French scenes, yet a more *rational* view of the French history is required. What is more, the British savage 'shriek of [...] horror' is disturbingly juxtaposed in *The French Revolution* with the savage and equally inarticulate shriek of delight which the gathered French crowds give at Robespierre's death. Both, Carlyle seems to be saying, in spite of British claims to moral and civilisational superiority, have ultimately something savage and truly demonic in them:

To shriek, we say, when certain things are acted, is proper and unavoidable. Nevertheless, articulate speech, not shrieking, is the faculty

¹⁵⁷ *FR* 3:41.

of man: when speech is not yet possible, let there be, with the shortest delay, at least—silence.¹⁵⁸

The comparison of the September Massacre to the bloody civil war followed by the massacre of Armagnacs by the Burgundies during the Hundred Years War is designed by Carlyle as a challenge to what he regards as hypocritical British perception of recent French history. In Carlyle's outlook, humanity is much less 'civilised' than we believe ourselves to be, and we are prone to fall short of our own high moral standards. The French massacres are not too different from the barbarities which had been committed during the Hundred Years War, much as British historians would prefer to forget that fact.¹⁵⁹ Merging and juxtaposing two historical planes (as he already does by consistently comparing revolutionary France and contemporary Britain), Carlyle quotes the answer of the revolutionaries to the appeal of the mayor of Paris during the Hundred Years War. In a nice touch of historical irony, in this depiction it is the British who are presented as 'dogs' and traitors and denied any sympathy:

'Maugre bieu, Sire,—Sir, God's malison on your justice, your pity, your right reason. Cursed be of God whoso shall have pity on these false traitorous Armagnacs, English; dogs they are; they have destroyed us, wasted this realm of France, and sold it to the English.' [...] And so they slay, and fling aside the slain, to the extent of fifteen hundred and eighteen.¹⁶⁰

The quote which particularly outraged the reviewer, Carlyle's deliberations on the frailty of human customs and morality, can be seen to form part of the Calvinist mentality which Carlyle inhabits, and in which the devil plays always an active part in human history: 'For though it is not Satan's world this that we live in, Satan always has his place in it (underground properly); and from time to time bursts up'.¹⁶¹ The devilish element in means that high moral standards often become translated into sinful action, and that the ethical language is often at odds with reality it strives to describe. Had the massacre been committed as part of the current politically correct language, Carlyle suggests, no moral protest would have been raised against the atrocities committed. Carlyle also challenges the overly confident vision of progressive improvement of human morality shared by Macaulay, Merivale, and Mill. If morality is indeed as absolutely historicised and unstable as Merivale suggests in his writings, then no moral

¹⁵⁸ *FR* 3:45.

¹⁵⁹ This insight becomes the main theme of Dickens's *A Tale of the Two Cities*.

¹⁶⁰ *FR* 3:43.

¹⁶¹ *FR* 3:45.

protests should have been raised against Carlyle's cold presentation of the September massacres. Carlyle here registers a deeply Scottish concern with the place of conscience in the social sphere specifically in the context of the irrationality of human laws and customs and state-approved morality, which often contradict the verdicts of conscience:

[W]hat a singular thing Customs (in Latin, Mores) are; and how fitly the Virtue, Virtus, Manhood or Worth, that is in a man, is called his Morality, or Customariness. Fell Slaughter, one the most authentic products of the Pit you would say, once give it Customs, becomes War, with Laws of War; and is Customary and Moral enough.¹⁶²

It is ultimately Carlyle's Calvinism, then, which allows him to sympathise with the French revolutionaries on a far deeper level than even Mill or the radical philosophical group of *The Westminster Review*. Contrary to the generally accepted perception of Carlyle's Calvinism as channelling his ultra-conservative perception of the Revolution, the image that emerges from our examination of the reception of *The French Revolution* in the periodical press is that of Carlyle profoundly challenging on the political, aesthetic and moral levels the contemporary British perception of the Revolution. Whereas Carlyle's political opinions are arguably far from democratic (contrary to, for example Rosenberg's reading¹⁶³) his cosmopolitan interest in foreign cultures and his sympathy for the French are indebted to his Calvinist spirituality and channelled via his study in Romantic aesthetics of the sublime.

¹⁶² *FR* 3:47.

¹⁶³ Compare: Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero*.

Conclusion

This thesis has read Carlyle's *The French Revolution* as a crucial aesthetic intervention in the debate on the Revolution in Europe, written within the framework of the contemporary periodical press. The book envisions a celebration of a grand imaginative moment in French (and indeed European) history, which is juxtaposed with a deeper Calvinist theme of *vanitas vanitatum* and the lack of permanence in this world even of the most sublime historical moments.

I have interrogated the prevalent critical constructions of Carlyle's work and found them to proceed predominantly from the Whig historical agenda, structured around such key nineteenth-century concepts as utilitarianism and civilisational and moral progress. Within this framework, Carlyle's largely conservative cultural stance and Christian spirituality are hardly allowed any creative potential and, ever since the famous portrayal of Carlyle by James Anthony Froude, have been seen as artistically-stunted, irrational, and out of touch with nineteenth-century political, social and cultural realities. Froude's portrayal of Carlyle as a disillusioned conservative with a fatalist moral Calvinist agenda of predestination, and Herman Merivale's reading of *The French Revolution* as a metaphysical (Scottish) misfit are examples of the misunderstanding of Carlyle's artistic agenda which have had a surprisingly long critical purchase. In both of these receptions, Carlyle's aesthetics has been deliberately under-read as either unimportant to his theological message (in Froude's case), or as an unnecessary and disruptive supplement to his social and historical narrative (in Merivale's). The apparently more positive appraisal of Carlyle's aesthetics by John Stuart Mill, when examined closely, turns out to be equally dismissive of Carlyle's moral, spiritual and artistic outlooks, since, according to Mill, *The French Revolution* does not live up to the utilitarian ideal of historical narrative.

I have read Carlyle's early texts, such as *The Diamond Necklace*, 'The Signs of the Times' and *Sartor Resartus* as artistic preparation for the debate with the Whig historical agenda staged in *The French Revolution*, with Mill's utilitarianism, as well as with *The Anti-Jacobin's* ultra-conservatism. In them, and even more consistently in *The French Revolution*, Carlyle specifically opposes the ideology of civilisational progress, seeing it from an orthodox Christian position as both an unrealistic and a demonic idiom (due to its suggestion that humanity improves morally with time). In 'The Signs of the

Times' Carlyle satirises the sectarianism and xenophobia of *The Anti-Jacobin's* cultural programme. He further develops this critique in his portrayal of German metaphysical philosophy in *Sartor*, and in *The French Revolution*, which enacts textually and linguistically a foreign 'infection' with the 'Jacobin' diction of France and Germany. In all of these texts Carlyle reads British isolationism as a dangerous phenomenon which can lead not only to a cultural stagnation, but also to a lack of critical reflection that awakens imaginative demons (such as the *Anti-Jacobin's* construction of the French). In a polemical dialogue with Macaulay's historical programme, Carlyle, in the essay 'On History' presents his artistic agenda as open, cosmopolitan and unafraid of posing fundamental spiritual and philosophical questions. Carlyle describes Macaulay's civilisational aesthetics as 'frigid', because it is locked in a narrow and uncritical vision of Britishness. Inspired by the mythological school of German Higher Criticism, Carlyle proposes a historical vision which is open to poetry and myth and to a creative dialogical co-existence of various cultural narratives.

Whereas in his early discussion with Schiller's sublime aesthetics, Carlyle is sometimes ambivalent about Schiller's progressivist ideology, *The French Revolution* can be read as a moral tale written in the orthodox Christian idiom of good and evil. I have also read the dialogue with Schiller as channelling for Carlyle Burke's sublime, which he uses provocatively in *The French Revolution* in celebration of the revolutionary mob (a move that even such a nineteenth-century radical liberal thinker as Mill sees as politically, if not artistically, far too subversive and revolutionary). In contrast to the generally accepted perception of Carlyle's Calvinism as an expression of his ultra-conservative politics modelled on *The Anti-Jacobin*, I have read it as allowing Carlyle to be politically and artistically innovative, and to challenge all the politically and nationally accepted narrations of the Revolution in France and Europe. Carlyle's application of Burke's aesthetics to historical events (rather than to fiction) can be seen as unique within the nineteenth-century British literary scene. While this sublime, Gothic depiction in *The French Revolution* registers Carlyle's belief in the operation of the devil in history, the true demonic event in contemporary European history, according to Carlyle, is not the French Revolution as such, but its multiple ultra-conservative readings in Europe following Joseph de Maistre's presentation of the French Revolution as a divine retribution, eagerly picked up by *The Anti-Jacobin Review*. Carlyle insightfully traces a lack of imaginative sensibility in these readings,

and juxtaposes it with the Enlightenment reading of the moral sense and with Christian charity.

In his debates with Mill, Macaulay, and Merivale, Carlyle registers lack of spiritual perspective on human life in nineteenth-century Britain, which he seeks to restore in *The French Revolution*. This is done primarily via the use of the sublime which he reads in *The Life of Schiller* as the language of the supernatural. In this project Carlyle can be seen, alongside John Henry Newman, to be seeking to restore the spiritual perspective as a rational and legitimate one, while he is inventing a contemporary spiritual language. Carlyle's debate with John Stuart Mill and the French Encyclopaedists (in 'Voltaire') posits Christian spirituality as a real and lasting element of British (and European) culture, and as a language of inter-cultural European communication. The prevalent narratives of the Revolution, which either dismiss Christian providence, translating it into the language of historical fatalism (Merivale, Macaulay, François Mignet, Adolphe Thiers, and later Mill), or usurp the divine perspective claiming to see the full meaning of historical events (Joseph de Maistre, Edward Irving, Thomas Malthus) are deeply demonic in Carlyle's reading. The ultimate beyondness of the divine vision means that human experience is never fully explained via any political, economic, social or moral theory and that none of the prevailing constructions of the Revolution is to be fully trusted. Creative non-conclusiveness and playful deconstruction of the prevalent post-revolutionary narratives of the French Revolution characterise Carlyle's deeply spiritual and artistically sophisticated text, which, in an orthodox Christian reading, rejoices in the messy, dark and complex residue of human history, through which Christian providence acts in mysterious and unexpected ways that do not allow for any simple, de-mythologised reading.

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