

Carlyle, Irving, and the Problematics of Prophecy

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Some secrets may the poet tell,
For the world loves new ways;
To tell too deep ones is not well—
It knows not what he says.

(Arnold “Stanzas in Memory” 137)

In the nineteenth century, the time of prophecy supposedly was over. For mainstream British Christianity, Revelation had completed prophetic discourse; for the Enlightenment, religion yielded to reason. Even the prophetic activity that marked the stresses of revolution in America and industrialism in England seemed a logical but delimited symptom of its moment.¹ Susan Juster counts at least “three hundred men and women who were recognized (by themselves or others) as prophets in England and North America in the period 1750–1820.” However, she concedes that the figure who provides the focus for this

¹Susan Juster gives the more complex reality up to Joanna Southcott. The present study refers to a perception shared even by prophet-to-be Edward Irv-

article, “the ‘gentleman prophet’” who “not only wrote learned treatises but who lent his intellectual authority to popular speculation about the end times” (64), faded with “the death of revolutionary hopes in 1815” (262). For Matthew Arnold, indeed, the role had been ceded to letters: “most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry” (“Study” 3).

Yet an obscure minister and an equally obscure writer rose side by side from a little-known part of Scotland to become the acknowledged prophets of this new age. Stranger still, they stood as prophets of opposed dispensations—the religious and the secular. And odder yet, instead of decrying one another, each recognized and helped his fellow. Together, they emerged from the Scottish wilderness to become the prophets of the new Babylon that was London.

Edward Irving, who seemed likely to remain a “stickit” minister, rose from dubious success as Thomas Chalmers’s assistant in Glasgow to gain adulation as leader of London’s Caledonian Chapel such that his popularity required the building of a new National Scotch Church. Yet he fell subject to Presbyterian heresy trials concerning his theories of Christ’s bodily humanity; argued that the time of prophecy had never ended and allowed speaking in tongues in his church; was consequently ejected by his London congregation and defrocked by the Scottish Presbytery that had ordained him; and, having ceded authority to his sect’s “prophets,” died on a mission tour to Scotland—believing almost to the last that God would save him and thereby demonstrate the modernity of miracle.² Thomas Carlyle, the mason’s son, rose by way of Edinburgh University and German literature, from Ecclefechan to Craigenputtoch and on to London, to become the “Sage of Chelsea.” From a similar religious and educational background, following and occasionally occupying Irving’s footsteps—he held the same jobs (teacher in Kirkcaldy); courted the same women (Margaret Gordon as well as Jane Welsh); and stayed with Irving in London—Carlyle moved on to observe the “Signs of the Times” and ul-

²Mrs. Oliphant’s biography of Irving remains the most complete and pro-

timately spout secular heresy in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850).³ Most fascinating, here, is that these biographies could arise at all—and fall into parallel.

How did Irving and Carlyle become the twinned prophets of an emerging age? The answer lies partially in the way prophecy works, and in the similar forms of Irving and Carlyle's different utterances and significances. Michel Foucault's dichotomy between madness and inspiration further helps one understand the shifting meanings of prophetic discourse and the variable social trajectories of two men who, Edward Irving predicted, would "shake hands across the brook, you as first in Literature, I as first in Divinity" (qtd. in Carlyle *Reminiscences* 230). "People will say," he went on, "Both these fellows are from Annan-dale: where is Annandale?" Looking carefully at the social structuring of literary belief may explain how anything prophetic could come out of Annan—and erupt in nineteenth-century London.

John Sterling summed up the end of prophecy and the substitution of the material world. In "our day such visionaries are less and less possible," he observed. "The spread of shallow but clear knowledge, like the cold snow-water issuing from the glaciers, daily chills and disenchant the hearts of millions once credulous." Now, these millions will "find in the world nothing but an epicurean stye, to be managed, with less dirt and better food, by patent steam-machinery; but still a place for swine, though now the swine may be washed, and their victuals more equally divided" (3) But on the cusp of the modern, the two systems that denied prophecy nonetheless provoked it. Philip Rosenberg suggests that "[t]he sense of being in an age of transition is quite unlike the sense of living in a period of progress" (24). "The feeling of living in a crack in the façade of time is, emotionally, never very far removed from the grim perception that one is caught" (25), as Arnold describes, "between two worlds, one dead / The other powerless to be born" ("Stanzas from the Grande" 305). Religious and secular subjects alike sought a voice to articulate their wilderness and prepare a way to the future.

In this between time, natural signs figured scientific wonders and beseeched social and religious ones. In fact, Thomas W. Overholt, who takes an anthropological approach to prophecy, insists that “The prophetic situation . . . is one in which the basic religio-cultural understanding has been undermined” (“Prophecy” 77). At this moment, Carlyle remarked, on March 23, 1822, “a ridiculous prediction, imputed to Professor Leslie, that horrible convulsions were to occur in the atmosphere last Friday—none of which occurred—but it is not exhausted yet” (*Collected Letters* 2:73). On February 4, 1829, Walter Scott read the extreme conjunction of civilization and brutality exemplified by the murderers William Burke and William Hare, who supplied celebrated anatomist Robert Knox with ready corpses, as raising the question, “Whether we shall at last eat each other, as of yore, or whether the earth will get a flap with a comet’s tail first” (Grierson 11:128). Both noted the conjunction of signs in need of signification and the growing role of Edward Irving. Scott jokingly responded to his own questions: “Who but the reverend Mr Irving will venture to pronounce” (11:128); Carlyle described Leslie’s signs alongside a portentous Irving sermon. And notably, Sterling rearticulated the signs of modernity through a new seer: Thomas Carlyle. That is, at a time of crisis, although religion was denied or its modes in abeyance, anthropological desire reproduced the role of prophet and filled it with Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle.

What constitutes a prophet? Today’s scholarship has refocused away from the message and toward a set of behaviors with a social function. In context of such structuralist perspectives one can see in the end of prophecy the inevitability of prophetic return. The prophet is an outsider: “prophetic intervention is detached, neutral, objective and authoritative in large measure because *it comes from outside*,” Ioan M. Lewis notes (116). This prophet has received a call from the divine: Overholt comments that “[i]n all instances of which I am aware it is simply assumed that a person who is truly functioning as a prophet has been the recipient of some such communication” (“Prophecy” 64). Thus, the prophet serves as an intermediary between the divine and the world (Wilson 28). While the prophet is supposedly inspired, the role depends on recognition by a community: Overholt asserts that if

“[p]rophets speak for some deity,” this “implies that they speak to a particular group of persons”; “Prophecy is a social phenomenon. Whatever authority they may get from on high, prophets are dependent upon audiences for their effective authorization” (*Channels* 17, 181). So prophets must behave in a particular way, for “[s]ocieties authenticate intermediaries partly on the basis of stereotypical behavior” (Overholt *Prophecy* 13). Such behaviors include practices but also forms of language, imagery, and so on (14). Indeed, the medium itself can transform the message into prophecy, to the degree that “linguistic unintelligibility enhances [its] authority” (Lewis 116; see also Balfour 9). But because societies are layered, there may be multiple prophets. “The problems facing intermediaries become even more complex when more than one group is involved,” Robert R. Wilson observes—not least because of contesting truths and audiences occupying shared words (68). Overholt credits James Crenshaw with the idea that “conflict with perhaps the great majority of those who heard them (even other prophets) was ‘inevitable’” (*Channels* 72). And lastly, prophecy can, in fact, come to an end. Certainly, it can fail or be fulfilled and in either case become outmoded. But it can also exceed the bounds of social tolerance or be succeeded by time. “Societies,” Wilson writes, “will not tolerate certain types of behavior”; but equally, “when crucial social features disappear . . . existing intermediaries must also disappear” (63, 28).

Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle seem to have followed this pattern; they proved the intermediaries for their moment. Irving’s outmoded belief and Carlyle’s anxious unbelief notwithstanding, they fulfilled the structures of prophecy. “Prophetic utterance,” Lewis suggests, can now be seen “as a product rather than producer of social transformation” (114). And Irving with all his overanxious religiosity and Carlyle with his transcendent secularism were products of their time. They gave back to the moment what it required: the recognition of signs; the sense of excessive meanings; the meaning in a divine beyond of heaven or Nature. “The fact that prophets claim to have had a revelation is probably not the decisive factor” in their recognition, writes Overholt, indicating how the confused Carlyle could achieve the status of prophecy (*Channels* 81). But the tone of the times produced

the meanings and modes of revelation and inspiration, completing the prophetic effect. At a time of great need, society required and a careful structuring of discourse produced the prophet.

Of course, not just anyone could fill these prophetic slots. Irving and Carlyle were particularly suited to the role. For Irving, his rather literalist post-university studies called into question the conventional attitude to prophecy. To him, the time of prophecy was still upon the world. First, biblical prophecy had a double application:

the former, of private application to a people and to a time close at hand; the latter, not of private interpretation, being spoken by the Holy Spirit for the good of the elect church in all ages, and waiting for its accomplishment till the time of the end, or of the Lord's glorious advent. ("Preliminary" xxxiv)

That double application was particularly pertinent because signs revealed the end was approaching: "almost all . . . interpreters of the Apocalypse, are agreed that we are living under the sixth vial. . . . Almost all believe that the 1260 days closed in the French revolution, and that the seven vials then began to be poured out upon those who had the mark of the beast" (xl). Second, "prophecy was meant to be the prerogative of all; and to speak with tongues the means of edifying a man thereunto" (Irving *Writings* 5:554).⁴ Since God had never declared an end to prophecy, it must maintain in the present moment and could be expressed once more through the gift of tongues. Moreover, Irving not only held these beliefs but published them and built and rebuilt congregations upon them, thus enacting the role of prophet (though never himself gifted with tongues).

As for Carlyle, he anticipated the theorizing of recent anthropologists. While he quietly set aside Christianity, he recognized its functions, not least prophecy. Whether as Divinity, Poet, or even Man of Letters, Carlyle's Hero depends on social recognition and serves as

⁴Although the title for this collection shifts between volumes, *Edward Irving's Writings* is consistently used as a short title, here further abbreviated to

prophet for his times. Shakespeare is thus “the grandest thing we have yet done,” even “a Prophet, in his way; of an insight analogous to the Prophetic” (*Heroes* 96, 94). “The Great Man” is in communication with Carlyle’s divine, “a Force of Nature; whatsoever is truly great in him springs-up from the inarticulate deeps” (96). A Christ in imagery and thus a prophet by any other name, “He is the living light-fountain. . . . The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world: and this not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven” (3-4). And of course, as “Man of Letters,” Carlyle himself, not too subtly, fulfills the role of Hero and thus Prophet. Carlyle may have enjoyed a spontaneous moment of inspiration. Biographer Fred Kaplan notes that

Going down Leith Walk on a blazing afternoon in August 1822, Carlyle realized . . . he had been mistaken all along in believing . . . “it was with Work alone, and not also with Folly and Sin, in myself and others, that I had been appointed to struggle.” The purpose of work was to create a visible structure that would articulate the quality of the inner spiritual life to ourselves and others. (82)⁵

But Carlyle also deliberately appropriated the modes and signs of prophecy. Chris Vanden Bossche observes, “He became fond of comparing Craigenputtoch to Patmos, the island in the Aegean where Saint John wrote the book of Revelations [sic], a place to write ‘mystical *Reviews*’ and to begin ‘prophesying’” (52), and David J. DeLauria comments that Carlyle saw “the convergence in himself of the various burdens of the nineteenth-century prophet” (119). James Anthony Froude quotes from a rejected manuscript, “Spiritual Optics,” that “all history is a Bible” (qtd. in Clubbe *Froude’s* 224), and Jules P. Seigel asserts that through his role of historian Carlyle “played out his role of Prophet” (*Thomas* 10).

What did they prophesy? Irving exhorted a return to Christianity; Carlyle tested mankind in the fiery furnace of “Work.” But most interestingly, surrounded by social ills they both abhorred, they

nonetheless railed equally against intellectualism. To Irving, intellectualism with its attendant utilitarianism had usurped Christianity and actually stolen the prophetic role. Thus, religion and science stood directly opposed over the ground of prophecy. Indeed, intellectualism had invaded the Church:

utilitarian Christians rail against prophesyings . . . because ye are become prophets in your several spheres, trying all conclusions by your foresight of their future effects and fruitfulness of good; so that it were cutting you out of your own craft, and exposing your own craftiness, that God should take upon him to prophesy. (“Preliminary” xlviii)

“It is Christ the prophet . . . by which the Holy Spirit takes hold of the human intellect, to shake it out of its own vain self-sufficiency, and bring down its proud imaginations” (lxxxiii).

Similarly, Carlyle abjured rampant intellectualism. Perversely, the great sceptic attacks all debunking of Mohammed as of-a-piece theoretical. He declares, “Alas, such theories are very lamentable. If we would attain to knowledge of anything in God’s true Creation”—minus the religion, one presumes—“let us disbelieve them wholly! They are the product of an Age of Scepticism; they indicate the saddest spiritual paralysis, and mere death-life of the souls of men” (*Heroes* 39). In “Characteristics,” he asserts that “[t]he healthy Understanding . . . is not the Logical, argumentative, but the Intuitive; for the end of Understanding is not to prove, and find reasons, but to know and believe” (355). Carlyle and Irving stood as prophets of opposed systems but addressed the same evils and required the same intuitive response.

Contemporary British need was able to sustain them both, recognizing each in his prophetic role. As a mere candidate for the Caledonian Chapel in London, Irving reported that “my head is almost turned with the approbation I received,” and from that moment in 1822 congregations waxed enthusiastically, even if they later periodically waned (qtd. in Oliphant 1:135). Irving certainly put himself in the way of prophecy. He sought teaching at Albury House and offered himself

as a pupil “to be instructed in prophecy” to Hatley Frere (*Babylon vi*); he cast his 1826 *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God* both stylistically and literally in the genre, speaking of “the prophecy of this book” (23).⁶ But the public confirmed the phenomenon: Oliphant reports that “the delighted, but embarrassed, managers of the little Caledonian chapel . . . had to hold the doors of their little building like so many besieged posterns against the assaults of the crowd” (1:163). George Canning listened to Irving and mentioned him in Parliament for preaching “the most elegant sermon that he had ever listened to” (Oliphant 1:158–59). The *London Quarterly Review* in a review of Oliphant’s biography of Irving summed up: “He stood before the people less as a minister than as a prophet” (185). And *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* looked back on him as a cure for the age: “When the religious life of a great nation . . . becomes s t a g n a n t . . . a lion-hearted, God-fearing, man-loving, Apostolic adventurer is a benefactor and a blessing” (“Genius” 9). Questioning Irving’s learning and logic, the magazine nonetheless declared: “His eloquence and his thought were but the instruments of a fervent, devoted, and sanctified soul. God gave him power. The Spirit witnessed unto him. He spake as a man having authority. He had the heart of a Prophet” (13).

Carlyle experienced similarly disproportionate recognition. At a moment when, Froude says, “the best and bravest of my own contemporaries determined to have done with insincerity,” Carlyle looked to a rising generation like “a prophet and teacher . . . his words were like the morning reveille” (qtd. in Clubbe *Froude’s* 418–19). No one, Froude says, could “doubt Carlyle’s power, or Carlyle’s sincerity” (420). “Simply a man,” Carlyle nonetheless “taught [Froude] a creed which I could then accept as really true” (420, 423); he had become “the Prophet of Cheyne Row” (421). Others, less easily enthused than the young Froude, nonetheless recognized Carlyle’s structural role. In 1824, Carlyle reported that some Londoners “persist in reckoning me a kind of genius,” and in 1830, he noted that Europeans “seem to

⁶From 1826, Henry Drummond held conferences on prophecy at Albury Park. Frere declared the coming of Christ imminent in 1824. See Arnold Dallimore for Frere’s relation to Irving (58–59).

think me a very promising man. . . . Thus a prophet is not without honour" (CL 3:199; 5:140). By 1844, Elizabeth Barrett Browning had taken on the discourse: to her and co-writer Richard H. Horne, Carlyle is "the Prophet of the Circle" (270). On his death, Edward Dowden recognized a "prophet whose venerable form is still instinct with miraculous power" (117).

Of course, these prophets were not always honored. Irving, Oliphant claims, always founded his arguments upon the ancient Confessions underpinning the Church of Scotland, but, paradoxically, it was in Scotland that he suffered his major humiliations (2:12). Occupying his first pulpit in Kirkcaldy, Irving saw his congregation diminish: "He had ower muckle gran'ner [grandeur], the good people said," and "[a] certain baker . . . kicked his pew-door open and bounced forth out of the church, when the lofty head of the young schoolmaster was seen in the pulpit" (1:67). And it was Annan Presbytery that finally defrocked him in 1833. *Blackwood's* mocked him unsparingly through 1823, laughing at his allegiance to Wordsworth, his attempts at poeticism, what it considered his self-publicizing, and his style ("Heaven" 346–53): "Be extravagant—be loud—thunder boldly, and your business is half done" ("Rev." 146). But here it merely echoed English attacks: "The Old Times calls him a quack and an ass. . . . John Bull . . . reiterates the cry of 'quackery' and 'cant,' adding, with much urbanity, the designation of 'the new Dr. Squintum [Irving had a lazy eye]'" (145). In fact, abjured both North and South of the border, Irving stood forth as the prophet not honored in his own country, and he showed how extensive that country had become in its prophetic need.

For Carlyle, too, excessive recognition came with its opposite. Prophet he might become, but even in 1834 he could make no money by his utterances. Froude comments, "He had created no 'public' of his own; the public which existed could not understand his writings and would not buy them, nor could he be induced so much as to attempt to please it; and thus it was that in Cheyne Row he was more neglected than he had been in Scotland" (qtd. in Clubbe *Froude's* 327). Moreover, contemporaries could easily adopt but might also pervert Froude's prophetic designation. Even Walt Whitman's celebratory remembrance

deploys the terms in a way faintly ridiculous: Carlyle may be “[a]llways precious,” but as “a new Micah or Habbakuk” he becomes almost comic (178). And of course, Carlyle’s chronic dyspepsia constantly intervened between him and the act of prophecy. But again, the effect was of prophetic overdetermination. DeLaura shows that Carlyle’s “complaint about finding the proper mode in which to ‘speak’”—or about the difficulty of speaking through illness—“is . . . part of the prophet’s role; for, as *Heroes* was to make clear, a gasping, writhing, stuttering speech is a common sign of the divinely given power whelming up in the authentic prophet” (122). If “[t]he beginning of Inquiry is [metaphoric] Disease,” then Carlyle, with his neglect, poverty, illness, and inarticulacy proved literally qualified for the prophetic role (Carlyle “Characteristics” 352).

Still, if others could recognize Irving and Carlyle as prophets, the real oddity is that they each recognized the other in the role. Recent studies agree on the “‘normality’ of conflict between prophets and . . . see this in terms of recurrent competition between rival claimants for prophetic leadership” (Lewis 115). Irving and Carlyle, prophets of opposed systems and struggling to occupy one space, should have been decrying one another alongside the intellectuals. Yet despite their many reasons for mutual denunciation, they got along. Notwithstanding their triangulated relationship with Jane Welsh, who “passionately” loved Irving but married Carlyle and made a career of denigrating her one-time lover to her husband (Kaplan 114–15; *CL* 3:37); without regard to their different personalities—Carlyle remarked Irving’s “heat of temper,” “joyous swagger,” “manly sociality,” and contrasted himself as “[n]ot sanguine and diffusive . . . but biliary and intense . . . ‘far too sarcastic for a young man’” (*Reminiscences* 184); ignoring Irving’s “*Self-love*, which [Carlyle defines] always as ‘love that others should love him’” (254); and remembering Carlyle’s ongoing insistence that “no popularity, and open-mouthed wonder of all the world . . . can make a man great” (“*Memoirs*” 302), they remained fast friends. This although “their contemporaries pushed them toward one another as potential rivals for praise,” and their lives became entwined beyond the point of intimacy—perhaps to the point of resistance (Kaplan 44).

How could Irving and Carlyle recognize one another at all? The an-

swer may lie in the “double dispensationalism” of their contrasting theories. The eclectic and assertive Irving forged a millenarian sensibility into an argument for a prophetic dispensation: “we have just accomplished a prophetic period of great prominence in the book of God,” he declared, “and entered upon another of still greater prominence in the divine threatenings”; Christ would return, and the elect would exercise their newfound gift of prophecy before the judgment to come (*Babylon* 40; “Preliminary” clii-clv; *Writings* 5:501). Who would speak and how? Irving anticipates “an order of men, of whom the Spirit so manifestly took possession as to make them utter the mysteries of godliness in an unknown tongue” (*Writings* 5:496). These, significantly, might connect with his early ambition to “make a demonstration for a higher style of Christianity, something more magnanimous, more heroic than this age affects” (Oliphant 1:141). And Carlyle would eventually declaim the dispensation of Heroes. As Michael K. Goldberg points out, “Though Carlyle did not allow chronology to become the determining factor in *On Heroes*, his schema does imply an evolutionary process” (lvii). The sequence runs from Divinity past Prophet and on through Poet, Priest, Man of Letters, and King. Here, Man of Letters constitutes the only slightly occluded apogee of Heroic form, yet all Heroes are structurally conflated and created as difference only by the dynamics of history and the capabilities of human recognition. In a new moment a Hero must be a Prophet, but he could have been a Divinity and might eventually be a Man of Letters. That is, each system supports its prophet yet maintains a space for the prophet as appropriate other. Carlyle’s tongue with its mystic telling bordered on Irvingite utterance; Irving was the prophet of another age and thus no less a Carlylean Hero.

The patterns of recognition between Irving and Carlyle prove interesting here. From the moment Irving told the young Carlyle, “two Anandale people must not be strangers in Fife,” he worked to support his friend (*Reminiscences* 185). Understanding Carlyle’s capable mind but concerned about its drift, in 1822 Irving chastened:

your penetration to perceive the remote bearings of the question, and your impatience to balance and judge the whole, with no call

of occupation or authority of any kind to drive you to settled issues, have produced that habit . . . of doubting of things certain rather than ascertaining things doubtful. This makes your knowledge yield you so little happiness, and it has not yet yielded you any power. (CL 2:63)

Thus, he set out to provide Carlyle with opportunities to focus his talents and develop that power, inviting him to Glasgow when he saw him falling prey to “the mental uncertainties which gave him neither peace nor respite” (Clubbe *Froude’s* 123); recommending him as a teacher to the Bullers—“Irving also has spoken magnificently of me: so . . . I need expect no supercilious or uncomfortable treatment there” (CL 2:24–25); encouraging him to come to London “to see the world, that so I might begin writing in good earnest” (CL 2:456); and designing him for editor of *Fraser’s Magazine* (CL 5:363). When Carlyle did turn to London, it was to Irving he went. And when Irving read *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34) in manuscript, he declared that he “‘perfectly agreed with [Carlyle] in what you had said about religion & the state of society,’ . . . [Carlyle] had shown great power & copiousness & learning” (CL 5:233).

Carlyle returned the compliment. To Carlyle, Irving’s “philosophy . . . is like a gill of ditch-water thrown into the crater of Mount Aetna: a million gallons of it would avail me nothing” (CL 3:232). Still, in a most unlikely manner, Carlyle defended Irving’s early heresy founded in the humanity of Christ, saying, “if the common interpretation of the Bible is to be followed, our friend is perfectly right, nay indubitably and palpably so” (CL 5:98). Awarding Irving his highest compliment, he went on: “My Mother . . . declared it to be soundest doctrine.” Greatly though he disliked the practices that grew around Irving and his church, and while he denigrated Irving’s “incredible notions,” called prophecy an “aberration,” parodied Irving’s discourse, and seriously argued his case with his friend, Carlyle nonetheless understood Irving’s exceptional and structural qualities (*Reminiscences* 293; CL 2:268; 6:51). Although wondering, “Why wasn’t there a bucket of cold water to fling on that lall-lalling hysterical mad-woman” prophesying in Irving’s house (*Reminiscences* 298), Carlyle re-

membered Irving untainted, as a “brave young prophet and reformer” (195). If he fell into “Irving . . . (poor fellow!),” nonetheless he “alone stands true” (CL 5:379). When others declared Irving mad, Carlyle held out that if his friend survived, he would “kick it to the Devil . . . and in new shape be himself again one day” (CL 7:255). That “self” even after the tortures of his deposition at Annan held “such heroic temper” (CL 6:353). Irving’s flaws, Carlyle asserts in his obituary, arose from his excessive—one might say heroic and thus prophetic—qualities. The Bible invited an involved and honest response; “A half-man could have passed on without answering; a whole man must answer. Hence Prophecies of Millenniums, Gifts of Tongues” (“Death” 405). Irving, Carlyle insists, with full recognition for his worth and role has performed a “work” (403).

Indeed, Irving and Carlyle not only recognized and facilitated one another, but each also gave the other ideas that ultimately served to confirm his fellow in the prophetic capacity. Irving directed Carlyle toward the life of Schiller: “He had been speaking with Taylor of the London Magazine; and was then full of a project that I should begin publishing in detail by that channel, a work I was speaking about last summer, a kind of picture-gallery of literary great men. . . . I am to commence with Schiller” (CL 2:300). Irving, previewing *Sartor Resartus*, recommended that “[t]he MS might be altered & expanded into a book likely to produce a great & salutary impression at the present time” (CL 5:233). Perhaps, hence *Sartor Resartus*, but also *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). Vice versa, Carlyle may have produced Irving’s drive toward prophecy against intellectualism: Irving wrote to Jane Welsh Carlyle in 1822, “Oh that God would give rest to [Carlyle’s] mind, and instruct him in his truth. I meditate a work upon the alienation of clever men from their Maker” (CL 2:414). And Irving’s iconoclastic speech to the fundraising London Mission Society, celebrating the wandering missionary—“a man without staff or scrip . . . abiding with whomsoever would receive him, speaking in haste his burning message” (qtd. in Oliphant 1:198)—consolidated into objectionable print at a time when Carlyle was telling Irving that “here . . . he has no home; he is a ‘missionary’ rather than a pastor” (CL

3:243).⁷ Carlyle may have helped precipitate Irving into opposition and disposed him to take his course not from his contemporary Christians but from the Bible itself—hence the end of times and the return of prophecy.

Certainly, it is no wonder that, so linked, these two recognized one another despite the differences in their systems and the disturbing shifts in their methods. Thus, the still rising Irving could hold Carlyle close even as “he at length despairs of ever seeing me converted” (CL 3:232). Then, as Irving sank toward prophecy, ejection, deposition, Carlyle could send him a message that “none more honestly desires his welfare.—O were I but joined to such a man! Would the Scotch Kirk but expel him . . . that we might fight together, for God’s true cause, even to the death! With one such man I feel as if I could defy the Earth” (CL 5:145–46). He could hope still to save him, to “[clutch] him from perdition and death” (CL 7:174). Together, they could reoccupy the space of prophecy.

But Irving and Carlyle were not one and the same. The great irony of their shared prophetic disposition and their mutual recognition is that they were prophets pointing in different ways. While Irving gestured toward a future, it was one completing a narrative already in place and collapsing time into the already prophesied eternal. Arguing that because it considered prophecy complete, the Church had “gone about to rest the evidence of our religion upon the miracles which attended the ministry of the Lord and his apostles, and so carried the question into the arcana of Christian antiquities,” Irving contends that the idea of prophecy yet to be fulfilled allows “looking forward to the future” (“Preliminary” lxxvii). “To look forward . . . hath been constantly the true attitude of the church of Christ,” he explains, “to expect the fulfilment of the prophetic word, and to desire it” (*Babylon* 20). But in so arguing, Irving simply articulates the paradox of biblical time. Thus, the *London Quarterly Review* was right to name him “a

⁷The speech took place in 1824; the 1825 pamphlet appears in Irving’s *Writings* (1:425–523). Carlyle’s remark is from January 1825, and in March he

prophet . . . like some risen Moses . . . some Elijah from the burning chariot,” yet it added that though he was “a man of the future, pointing reverently onwards, he was essentially a man of the past. . . . The burden of his ministry was, *Thus saith the Lord!*” (Rev. of *Life* 185–86).

By contrast, Carlyle questioned progress yet pointed to the future. In a mechanistic and possibly static universe he called for “Work.” The vision was not inherently positive, since the exhortation often extended into “[w]ork while it is yet day, for the night cometh in which no man may work” (John 9:4), a prophetic line that might be seen to resolve into Irving’s future/past at worst and into the void at best. But Carlyle nonetheless offered a forward dynamic. *Heroes* did indeed stress the contingency of the moment. Each Hero befits his times, for “[t]he earnest man, speaking to his brother men, must always have stated what seemed to him a *fact*, a real Appearance of Nature. But the way in which such Appearance or fact shaped itself . . . was and is modified by his own laws of thinking” (*Heroes* 24). Still, the flip side of such solipsism was that heroes changed with the advancing times. As Eloise M. Behnken has it, “A recognition of the dual nature of time, with its promise and its threat, appears often in Carlyle’s writings, but no matter which pole is emphasized, the call is always for men to put their shoulder to the wheel” (113).

Yet however different Carlyle and Irving in their theories and dynamics, they could meet and cross in a culturally prophetic moment. They were aided greatly in their apparent similarity by the discursive expectations of their times. Invested in “belief,” “faith,” and “truth,” they not only fulfilled the role of prophet, but they also adopted its language. Such an observation is not new. Carlyle’s language and textual sources have been ably traced by many, notably Ruth apRoberts and Albert J. LaValley. Yet not only did both men invoke the terms of belief and faith and quote the Bible, but they also adopted such language as a site of prophetic mystification rather than clarity. Carlyle noted that both owed a debt to their Scottish and religious inheritance, that “Irving and I were probably among the last products it delivered” (*Reminiscences* 177). He admired Irving’s early style, applauding the “broad potency of his delineations, exhortations and free flowing eloquencies, which had

all a manly and original turn" (194). But in sequence Irving and Carlyle recreated that style into a latter-day prophecy, recuperating Reformation-era divines in Irving's case and winding in Germanic periods for Carlyle's. Such style located both within the realms of the poetic. Irving actually attempted poetry as the peak of his religious expression in his "Preliminary Discourse" to his translation of Lacunza (cxcii). To John Stuart Mill, *The French Revolution* (1837) seemed "not so much a history, as an epic poem" (17).

Browning and Horne read these occluded signs aright. It was not that "Mr. Carlyle is *too* poetical to be philosophical, but that he is so poetical as to be philosophical in essence" (269). Irving's erstwhile mentor Chalmers found his style "woeful. There is power and richness, and gleams of exquisite beauty, but withal, a mysterious and extreme allegorization" (qtd. in Oliphant 2:21), and Scott labeled it "*outré*" (Grierson 9:72). Even Carlyle's supporters bemoaned that he "should imagine that the truths which . . . he reveals are so overpoweringly dazzling that they cannot be presented to vulgar visual organs without . . . German smoked glasses" (Rev. of *Chartism* 116). Still, many recognized the heightened significance implied by linguistic impenetrability. Leslie Stephen suggested that through his style "Carlyle's words have . . . the quality of deeds. Intensity is the cardinal virtue of his style" (352). And the sceptical *Edinburgh Review* understood "the extraordinary impression which Irving produced as a preacher." His discourses swelled with "grandeur both of thought and language, a richness of conception, a grasp of imagination, and at times a wondrous poetry of spiritual feeling." "The reasoning," it noted, "may be cloudy and ambitious . . . but there is the glow of awakened thought everywhere" (Rev. of *Life* 441).

But it was precisely through this style that prophecy became outworn. Wilson contends that prophecy can exceed or be succeeded in its moment. The overwrought language of excessive signification ultimately constituted the point of prophetic collapse for both Irving and Carlyle. Language pushed to this degree of immanence can topple over into mere utterance or become distressingly clear—in either case laying open to criticism the structuring that produces a prophet. Herein lay the demise of Irving and, to a lesser extent, Carlyle as prophets to a nation

and to one another.

Irving's doctrines were already causing him trouble within the institutions of the Church. In 1830 he was convicted of heresy by the London Presbytery for his concept of Christ's bodily humanity and potential corporeal sinfulness, and he withdrew from the group just in advance of his excommunication. In 1831 the General Assembly censured him and anticipated a possible prosecution. Yet it was not the content but the linguistic manifestation of his beliefs that brought Irving down as a prophet for his age. Following the logic of his Bible-inspired doctrine, Irving expanded his ideas from a belief that these were times of prophetic fulfilment to one that the gifts of the early Church had never been withdrawn and should still operate among the elect. Indeed, their return would be a sign of righteousness, the end of times, and the future role of those saved. This is the growing burden of his *Babylon*, "Preliminary Discourse," and writings on "The Church, with her Endowment of Holiness and Power," and "On the Gifts of the Holy Ghost Commonly Called Supernatural."⁸ Overlapping with Irving's theorizing and earnest congregational prayers for the gift of tongues, such utterance did break out in Scotland.⁹ Small wonder that at this moment when Irving and his congregation together felt isolated—a small prophetic group in the British wilderness—tongues began to utter in the Church of Scotland.¹⁰ It was this, rather than the shocking doctrine evoking them, that ejected Irving not just from his Church (May 2, 1832), and then from his ministry (March 13, 1833), but from his prophetic role.

Lewis suggests that "the crucial question" in manifestations of tongues "is not so much the mere provenance of the exotic language itself. Of much greater significance is the meaning it carries for the prophet and its public" (114). Certainly, in the context of a growing British empire it is not surprising to see Irving's congregation uttering tongues and identifying them according to exotic known languages. The

⁸The two latter pieces are collected in his *Writings* (5:449–66).

⁹See especially Oliphant (2:chapters 3–4) and Dallimore (85–107).

speaker's power is not of this ecclesiastical world but of nineteenth-century expansionism, perhaps (Oliphant 2:206).¹¹ But others viewed these utterances differently—as religious aberrations, maybe, but more notably as social ones disturbing the discourse of contemporary order. Irving himself strove to keep the voices within bounds, arrogating to them a particular place in his services, but they soon exceeded his control; he eventually yielded on the biblical conviction that “I cannot be a party in hindering that which I believe to be the voice of the Holy Ghost from being heard in the church” (Oliphant 2:188, 195). The results were raucous and disorganized. Where Irving reported that “I was seated in the great chair, and was enabled by my single voice to preserve order among, I dare say, 3000 people, and to exhort them, as Peter did at Pentecost” (qtd. in Oliphant 2:204), a Mrs. Hamilton registered “an evident uproariousness . . . men's voices continually mingling with the singing and the praying in most indecent confusion” (qtd. in Oliphant 2:201), and the *Times* reported

the congregation was disturbed by individuals pretending to the miraculous gift of tongues. . . . a Miss Hall . . . was compelled to retire into the vestry, where she was unable . . . to restrain herself. . . . a Mr. Taplin . . . rose from his seat, and commenced a violent harangue in the unknown tongue. . . . The whole congregation rose from their seats in affright. (Qtd. in Oliphant 2:202)

Overbalanced into democratic utterance, the immanence of prophetic signification had collapsed into mere babble.

On these grounds Irving was ejected from his church. The Annan Presbytery followed suit, removing him from the ministry. As Mrs. Oliphant points out, “there were no direct laws of the Church of Scotland against the exercise of an entirely unexpected endowment” (2:243). The issue, rather, lay in ecclesiastical order and congrega-

¹¹Although some congregants identified the tongues as actual foreign languages, Irving himself distinguished inspired speech from merely speaking a

tional deportment. Significantly, the London panel based its case on the *Directory for the Public Worship* (1644) and its dictum that “[t]he public worship being begun . . . the people are wholly to attend upon it, forbearing to read anything, except what the minister is then reading or citing; and abstaining much more from all private whisperings, conference, &c., and other indecent behaviour” (qtd. in Oliphant 2:291). Further, they proved particularly outraged at voicing from non-members and women (Oliphant 2:261).¹² Confirmation that the issues were social comes in the *Times*’s unlikely agreement that Irving had encouraged

fooleries . . . from the whole male and female band of [his] select performers. So long as the rev. gentleman occupied the stage himself . . . he was heard with patience . . . but when he entered into partnership with knaves and impostors . . . it was impossible any longer to tolerate the nuisance. (Qtd. in Oliphant 2:298)

Here, Carlyle too parted from his prophetic double. Jane Welsh Carlyle called Irving’s house “Bedlam . . . where people are to be found at all hours ‘*speaking with tongues*’ that is to say shrieking and howling in no tongue” (CL 6:35). William Graham told Carlyle that as Irving yielded authority to those who thus prophesied, “These daringly presumptuous men called Elders are become his imperious taskmasters; he is sunk under their proud control; he is now their ‘thral’ instead of being the Angel of the Church, its Prophet, Law-giver and director” (CL 7:297). Carlyle himself registered that Irving had passed beyond the point of meaning and into the contexts of class when he began to celebrate utterance in others. Irving’s linguistic display, thus generalized, debased him in his role as prophet. “Even the Cockneys are too old for such lullabies,” Carlyle lamented. “They simply think he is gone distracted, or means to ‘do’ them” (CL 6:51). Ironically, Irving had advised the young Carlyle to publicize his ideas: “Get them tongue” (CL 1:217). Now that he had lost his own voice by sharing its

¹²Irving explicitly included women as deserving of “the gifts” (*Writings* 5:555).

prophetic role, Irving was the Carlylean prophet in *potentia*, who had fallen out of his moment.

As for Carlyle, he suffered a similar, if belated, fall from his prophetic elevation. For him, too, the excessive immanence of meaning eventually forced a rift between sound and the implication of sense. Many critics, however bemused by Carlyle's style to this point, locate the rupture in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850). Seigel hears in these "the voice of the biblical prophet, condemning and exhorting. This voice, however, fuses with that of the satirist" ("Latter" 162). Together, for Kaplan they produce "[t]he shriek of satiric and Swiftian despair" (270). It was not a sound easy on the mid-nineteenth-century ear.

Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* shows a style, a mode of thought, and a cultural role pushed to their limits. To one of the author's more sympathetic critics, David Masson, in terms eerily reminiscent of Irving's debacle, Carlyle had "completed his career of respect for his fellow-men; parted with the last shred of his care for their approbation; reached the pulpit, where it is the condemnation of his own soul if he does not speak out, even if they stone him" (7). Carlyle declaims, "Days of endless calamity, disruption, dislocation, confusion worse confounded" (*Latter-Day* 2);

Between our Black West Indies and our White Ireland, between these two extremes of lazy refusal to work, and of famishing inability to find any work, what a world have we made of it, with our fierce Mammon-worships, and our benevolent philanderings, and idle godless nonsenses of one kind and another! (32)

He goes on: "You perceive, my friends, we have actually got into the 'New Era' there has been such prophesying of . . . and it is by no means the land flowing with milk and honey. . . . A terrible *new* country this" (56). Democracy offers no cures to this prophet howling in a wilderness of words and unbounded by time. As a result, the contemporary audience was confused by Carlyle's sound, when it wasn't shocked by his sense.

Criticism of Carlyle's style became more intense. Masson pities the

poor reader: “when at last he is released, it is with a ringing in the ears, a universal sense of stupor, and knees absolutely knocking against each other for faintness”—but no new knowledge (11). W. E. Aytoun wonders if any meaning could emerge clearly from Carlyle’s language: “This may not be Mr. Carlyle’s meaning,” he admits after interpreting the argument, “but he has no title to be angry, were we to accept his words according to their evident sense. If men . . . will write in this absurd and reckless fashion, they must be prepared to stand the consequences” (646). Through the impenetrability of his style and the inaccessibility of his meanings, the famed exploder of shams looked like “a Phantasm of the species which he is pleased to denounce” (642).

But even as excessive utterance shaded into meaninglessness, Carlyle’s messages were becoming too clear. Once vague and portentous, here they lurched from the haze of words as specific and tawdry. Slurs against Democracy and other institutions took disturbing form in attacks on Blacks, for instance. As Masson remarks, “Most men . . . begin with the vehement, the intolerant, the aggressive; and . . . end in the calm, the acquiescent, the otiose. . . . [Carlyle] has ended as the most aggressive man of his age” (1). And that aggression seemed harsh and unfair. The even-handed Masson gently complains that to Carlyle paupers seem “a *prima facie* evidence that . . . they are weaker than their fellows; but . . . he seems to forget that . . . the worldly struggle . . . may not have yet been . . . a fair comparative trial of the whole merits of the competitors” (30). Masson now glimpsed in Carlyle “a teacher of what seems to be false, cruel, and mischievous” (15). The prophet’s excessive style had revealed unfortunate sense.

Most unfortunate for Carlyle is that this shaded over into low comedy, and comedy is not a known prophetic attribute. To Aytoun, “Mr. Carlyle has got a new crotchet into his head” (643). *Punch* finds him out-and-out ridiculous. In a hilarious squib, Carlyle is “charged with being unable to take care of his own literary reputation” (“Punch’s” 107). State’s witness, policeman Nokes, “did not believe the reputation of the accused in any positive danger, until . . . he detected him running wildly up and down the pages of *Fraser’s Magazine*” (107). No-

tably, Carlyle is pilloried both for his rampant language and his outrageous content. He has been “pelting all sorts of gibberish at the heads of Jamaica niggers—fantastically reproaching them for being ‘up to the ears, content in pumpkins, when they should work for sugar and spices’ for their white masters.” Carlyle has started “dealing in language only dear to the heart—witness meant pockets—of Yankee slave-owners and Brazilian planters.” Worse, the prophet seems completely dissociated from the significance of his sounds: “Mr. *Punch* asked the accused, if he had anything to say.” The prophet replies “with a withering smile”:

“Preternatural Eternal Oceans”—“Inhuman Humanitarians”—“Eider-down Philanthropy”—“Wide-reverberating Cant”—“Work Sans Holiday”—“Three Cheers more, and Eternal, Inimitable, and Antipodean Fraternity”—“Pumpkindom, Flunkeydom, Foolscapdom, and Pen-and-Inkidom!” (107)

Carlyle’s excessive discourse and his ill-focused Jeremiads looked ridiculous to the tone of these shifting times.

Carlyle was falling out of his prophetic role. As Vanden Bossche notes, he “represents the audience of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* as permanently blinded, fools and ‘blockheads’”; “The rhetorical strategy . . . is to test his audience in order to discover whether they belong to the elect and to drive away unbelievers” (130–31). But the test separated not so much sheep from goats as audience from Carlyle. The combination of prophetic declamation, shocking assertion, and linguistic confusion provoked Aytoun to sum up:

We have a strong suspicion that Cassandra must have been a prophetess reared in the same school as Mr. Carlyle. Her predictions seem to have been shrouded in such thorough mysticism, that no one gave her credit for inspiration; and in consequence [her warnings] were spoken to the empty winds. Here, perhaps, we ought to guard ourselves against a similar charge of indistinctness. We by no means mean to certify that Mr. Carlyle is a prophet.

(657)

In fact, Carlyle's prophetic trajectory aligned him with Irving. They were each confirmed in their role by falling out of it. To invoke Foucault, if they had once seemed inspired, divine prophets, in their latter days and to an advancing society they seemed lunatic babblers—perhaps even demonic utterers. Irving himself, given his system, had been alert to the possibility of demonic possession (*Writings* 5:558). A leading and then lapsed prophet of his church had testified to the London Presbytery that he himself “ought to have watched as well as prayed; and, being taken off his guard, he fell under the temptation of the enemy” (Baxter xlvi). But Carlyle participated in the changing discourse when he hoped that Irving would be “delivered from this real Delusion of the Devil” (CL 6:41). And changing times would label them both mad. *Punch's* respectable witness notes “rabid symptoms” in the first pamphlet of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, “barking and froth” in the second (“Punch's” 107).

“All balloons do and must give up their gas in the pressure of things, and are collapsed in a sufficiently wretched manner before long,” Carlyle writes (*Latter-Day* 8). In a place each recognized as the modern Babylon, both Irving and Carlyle could experience an afflatus characterized as divine (Irving *Babylon*; Carlyle “Death” 402). Each could—and did—swell with the signs of the times. Each even published under that title.¹³ The times, split between the Christian and the secular but haunted by the need for the spiritual, could bear up two. And in this nineteenth-century moment, these prophets could oddly recognize and support one another—perhaps inevitably, in fact. Carlyle wondered, confusedly, how his reminiscence of Irving came to be “more about myself than him” (*Reminiscences* 307). But reading Irving's biography and pondering the modern and structural problematics of prophecy shows that any reminiscence of Carlyle might equally have been about the minister of the National Scotch Church. Irving and Carlyle together prophesied and were the signs of their times—until those times wore out,

¹³Carlyle credited Irving for his “share in that ‘Signs of the Times’” and

and the signs collapsed under the combined pressures of excessive signification and the time to come.

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